

Emotion and Gender in Local
Anti-Austerity Activist
Cultures

Emma Craddock

BA (Warwick), MA (Nottingham)

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Abstract

While large-scale studies of European anti-austerity movements exist, there is a need for in-depth, ‘thick description’ of anti-austerity activist cultures which explores the sustaining as well as motivating factors for political engagement. Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to differences, including gendered differences, *within* counterhegemonic movements to highlight the power imbalances that exist. This thesis utilises a cultural and affective approach combined with a gender lens to explore the lived and felt experiences of political participation and the gendered dimension of these. It contributes to developing a cultural and feminist approach to studying movements that takes account of emotion and gender by developing an in-depth understanding of a local anti-austerity activist culture.

The research used a combination of qualitative research methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 30 anti-austerity activists in Nottingham. It reveals the central role of emotions in motivating and sustaining activism, uncovering the sustaining processes of solidarity and collective identity, and the importance of reasserting these in the face of an individualistic neoliberal capitalism. It identifies existing gendered barriers and exclusions to activism and ways of overcoming these, revealing that activism’s negative effects are gendered, with women feeling anxiety and guilt for not “doing enough” of the ‘right’ type of activism (direct action). This prioritising of direct action denigrates online activism, which is constructed as its opposition, underlined by the talking versus doing binary construction. Despite its supposedly abstract, universal character, it emerges that the ‘ideal perfect’ activist is the able-bodied male. The implications of this are explored, revealing the ‘dark side’ of activism which is hidden from public view. The thesis also identifies the construction of the ‘authentic’ activist who has the required lived experiences to be a ‘true’ activist, raising issues of representation. It

therefore unravels the tensions between participants' claim that "anyone and everyone can and should do" activism, and the constraints that prevent individuals from becoming politically active, including, problematically, how the 'activist' identity is constructed.

The thesis highlights the importance of 'care' within the context of austerity, demonstrating the 'retraditionalisation' of gender roles and norms, with the redrawing of the public/private divide. In response, it explores how activism can be redefined as a form of degendered care, drawing on participants' emphasis on empathy and universalist discourses. Overall, it contributes to social movement and feminist theory, as well as their overlap, by developing a cultural, affective, and feminist approach to studying social movements which takes account of gendered differences in activist experiences.

Publications

Craddock, E. (2016) 'Caring about and for the cuts: A case study of the gendered dimension of austerity and anti-austerity activism', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 21 (1): 69-82.

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to Anti-Austerity Activist Cultures

Crisis: 'To separate or cut, to make fixed, settled or stated [...] refers to a sharply defined, climactic event, possibly dangerous, but in any case decisive' (Williams, 2012: p.x).

The financial crisis of 2008 marked the beginning of a seismic shift in economic, political, and social history. The first quake, starting with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the U.S, sent shockwaves throughout the financial sector and, relatedly, the Western world. It was followed closely by repeated 'aftershocks'. Seemingly beginning 'underground' with cracks and shifts in the financial sector, unseen to the public eye, the culmination of high-risk decisions and lending within the context of an unregulated global capitalism was the biggest economic disaster to occur since the American Great Depression of the 1930s. Unlike an earthquake, however, this disaster was human-made.

The UK government's immediate response was to contradict the neoliberal ideology of minimal state intervention in markets by 'bailing out' the failing banks, using state funds to stabilise the financial sector. The resulting public deficit took centre stage, while the banks and millionaire bankers sidled off at the wings. Rather than making any serious attempt to tackle the problems of unregulated global capital which, combined with increasing individualisation, resulted in a culture of selfish, high-risk decision-making by those in charge of financial markets, the focus became reducing the deficit by cutting public expenditure. Austerity was now the main agenda. The UK was reimagined as a household who had spent more on their 'out-goings' than their income afforded. To re-balance the books, 'cutbacks' had to be made. As Worth (2013: 116, 117) observes 'austerity is deemed as both necessary and a way of redirecting the cause of the crisis so that reckless

fiscal spending is seen as the root cause [...] the necessity of austerity is backed by the belief that too much state spending has preceded it’.

In the autumn of 2010, the UK’s chancellor, George Osborne, announced a programme of austerity to be imposed across the country, involving widespread and deep cuts to public spending. Between 2010 and 2015, 35 billion pounds of cuts were made, with a further 55 billion pounds to be cut by 2019 (Gentleman, 2015). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2014) stated that ‘colossal cuts’ to public spending will take government spending to its lowest point since before World War Two and that by the end of this process ‘the role and shape of the state will have changed beyond recognition’. It becomes clear that austerity is more than a solution for managing government debt; it is an ideological extension of neoliberalism. In other words, austerity is the guise that enables a drastic shrinking of the welfare state and an increase in privatisation and financialisation, turning citizens into consumers of previously public services. In 2013 David Cameron demonstrated this, speaking of forging a “leaner, more efficient state [...] we need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently”. Cameron’s statement draws our attention to the fact that the current period of austerity is the latest stage in a long history of neoliberalism. In order to understand this current period, we need to situate it within its wider historical context.

Most simply understood, neoliberalism is a political ideology and its associated policies that assert the importance of free markets as the guiding principle of society and the most efficient distribution of resources. Neoliberalism proposes that through market-based economic practices, individual freedoms are fostered. The state, and particularly the welfare state, are seen to hamper such freedoms and thus need to be minimised. As Harvey (2007: 2) states, neoliberalism:

[p]roposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills

within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free-trade.

Thus, the state guarantees the quality and integrity of money, secures private property rights and the proper functioning of markets but other than this, according to neoliberalism, state intervention should not exist, resulting in deregulation of markets, privatisation, and the withdrawal of the state from social provision (Harvey, 2007).

The first phase of neoliberalism began in 1979 with Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US. Thatcher 'used a strong state to "roll back" state interference and consolidate free market mechanisms', deregulating the labour market and thus making labour more 'flexible' (Munck, 2005: 63). Welfare and full employment were condemned by Thatcher as obstacles to economic growth; she proclaimed in 1981 that "the relentless growth of the public sector has put a crushing burden on the private wealth-creating sector". Thatcher proposed a vision of a society where class did not matter, created by the free market and competition rather than co-operation, thereby destroying collective forms of organisation such as trade unions (Todd, 2014: 319).

The second phase of neoliberalism began in the 1990s with the New Labour government and Tony Blair, and continued this notion of the 'classless' society, with the famous remark made by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, in 1997: "we're all middle class now". This second phase also continued the privatisation of previously public services through the rolling out of new policies that reinforced this (Munck, 2005: 63). Britain was becoming an increasingly unequal society with the poorest 10 percent of the population getting poorer while a tiny elite concentrated greater amounts of wealth in its hands (Todd, 2014: 339). Rather than eradicate this inequality, New Labour sought to ameliorate poverty, focussing on discourses of the 'underclass' that perpetuated a

'culture of worklessness' and demanded 'rights without responsibilities' (Todd, 2014).

Such moral discourses which began with Thatcher's claim to transform people's 'souls' through economic practices, and strengthened in the days of New Labour, have continued to gain currency in the current, third, phase of neoliberalism. The 2010 Coalition government blamed unemployment on workers, and reaffirmed the discourse of 'shirkers versus workers' or 'skivers versus strivers'. In 2012, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, denounced those who spent their days "sleeping off a life on benefits". The growing presence and influence of these discourses is reflected by the rise in the use of the word "scrounger" in British tabloid papers from 46 times in 2007 to 240 times in 2011 (Todd, 2014: 350). A key part of neoliberalism's success is its use of common moral discourses and traditional values such as individual freedom, work ethic, and fairness (Harvey, 2007); the last of which has been invoked in the fight against austerity to turn the focus back onto the growing inequality between the rich and the poor and the injustice of this.

Critically, neoliberalism is not just a set of policies or ideologies but a strategy of governance for the global world which permeates all areas of social life. Brown (2015: 10) asserts that as:

[a] normative order of reason developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality, neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavour, along with humans themselves.

Munck (2005: 64) reinforces this, suggesting that the neoliberal value of competitiveness permeates all areas of society and human activity from households to the world economy. Crucially, as Brown contends, this includes areas of social life that are not supposed to be economic, with neoliberalism configuring all human beings as market actors, always,

only, and transforming them from *homo politicus* into *homo oeconomicus*. Thus, neoliberalism erodes democracy as rule by the people for the people, as well as the human capacities for ethical and political freedom, creativity, and any activity which is non-economic. At the same time, it encourages the 'economization' of all arenas of social life, meaning that individuals no longer start from a position of equality as humans because the value of competition is grounded in inequality between individuals (Brown, 2015: 38). As Brown (2015: 44) asserts, then, 'neoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity'.

Significantly, neoliberalism's transformation of government into governance involves 'soft power' that is 'termitelike [...] boring in capillary fashion into the trunks and branches of workplaces, schools, public agencies, social and political discourse, and above all, the subject' (Brown, 2015: 35-6). However, it is not merely destructive but also creates new subjects and relations, centred around the economic rationality of competitiveness. By operating in this manner, neoliberalism infiltrates all areas of life but does so quietly, becoming the hegemonic mode of discourse to the extent that it is viewed as 'common-sense' and the only way, through which individuals interpret, live in, and understand the world (Harvey, 2007: 3).

It is here that austerity enters, as a key element of the latest phase of neoliberalism. While such a lengthy explanation of the historical roots of neoliberalism may seem superfluous, it is vital to situate the current period within this history and to set out key features of neoliberalism at the outset, as these re-emerge throughout. Indeed, neoliberalism provides the backdrop to anti-austerity movements; moreover, it is within a neoliberal context that such movements operate, and I will demonstrate how activists both internalise and subvert neoliberal ideologies, as well as the subtle ways that neoliberalism and its

discourses infiltrate and impact on activist cultures. For now, I turn to situate austerity and its resistance within this wider historical context.

While the current period represents the continuation of the neoliberal project that began in 1979, the use of austerity as a guise for this project is distinct and significant as, largely, the British public have accepted austerity as necessary. Austerity therefore acts as a Trojan horse that enables the rapid dismantling of the welfare state and the increasing privatisation and financialisation of society to occur with little resistance. Thus, austerity is ‘a neoliberal shock doctrine providing an excuse for further appropriation of social resources for the rich’ (Levitas, 2012: 322). Reflecting the historical roots of this neoliberal project, in 2013, David Cameron echoed Margaret Thatcher, announcing resolutely that “there is no alternative [to austerity]”. This assertion reflects the government’s neglect of democratic processes and links to Brown’s (2015) claim that neoliberalism erodes democracy, as ‘decisions on the implementation of austerity are thus made in a manner that precludes the possibility of meaningful discussion or consultation’ (White, 2016: 26).

Significantly, the financial crisis that has unfolded since 2008 is ‘not merely economic. It is structural and multidimensional’ (Castells et al, 2012: 1), and has resulted in a deepening of the crisis of political legitimacy, provoking debate about the transformation of democracy in recent times. Della Porta (2015) asserts that anti-austerity politics is as much about reconfiguring democracy as it is about defending social protections of the past. Indeed, coinciding with the financial crisis is a crisis of trust in traditional political institutions; the results of survey data from between 2009 and 2011 reveal that 11.7 percent of anti-austerity protestors in the UK would agree with the statement “I quite trust the national government” and only 6.8 with the statement “I quite trust the political parties”. Notably, out of seven European countries, the UK scored the second lowest on indicators of trust.

It might be expected that within such a political climate of distrust, disillusionment, and despair, that citizens would become apathetic and remove themselves from political participation. However, while there was widespread anger and rejection of mainstream politics, it is also true that moments of crisis open up spaces of possibility. As Shannon (2014: 2) asserts:

When historical moments of crisis hit — when people’s expectations are undercut by austere social realities — they shake the faith in capitalism that allows it to be continually reproduced in our daily lives. People begin to see that the way that we’ve organised our lives is one option, but that other possibilities may also be on the table. While global movements have also arisen in times when capitalism has not been in crisis, in the current, historical moment, crisis was a primary spark.

In other words, people (and especially the dispossessed) start to see that, actually, there *is* an alternative. As Holloway (2010) explains, ‘cracks’ in capitalism begin to show, revealing the possibility for agitation to widen these cracks. Likewise, Butler and Athanasiou (2015) demonstrate the ‘double-sided effects of dispossession, including the opportunity to create new social bonds and forms of collective struggle against the suffering, immiseration and violence of austerity politics’ (Brah et al, 2015: 5). White (2016) suggests that in the UK, the combining elements of a decline in traditional forms of left organisation and a crisis of political legitimacy results in the opening up of a space for non-institutional social movements that seek to challenge not only austerity but the wider neoliberal capitalist system that underpins it.

Certainly, post-recession, there was a surge in collective action (Giugni and Grasso, 2015: 2), reflected by the rise of movements such as the Spanish Indignados, the American Occupy, and UK Uncut.

Demonstrating the intertwining of the economic and political crises, such movements sought to reframe austerity as an ideological attack on the poorest in society, highlight the growing inequalities between the richest 1 percent and the other 99 percent, and address issues of political representation by drawing attention to the democratic deficit. Shannon (2014: 13) remarks that 'living in an age of multiple crises creates multiple possibilities for the widening of antagonisms between privilege and power, on the one hand, and the dispossessed, on the other'. This notion is no better summed up than by Occupy's pitting of the 99 percent, hard-working, 'ordinary' citizens against the 1 percent of 'fat cats' who were deemed responsible for the financial crash but faced none of the consequences. Anti-austerity protests therefore represent a reaction to the government's response to the economic crisis, which rather than holding the bankers and financial markets to account, focussed on cutting public funding, affecting the poorest in society and the 'ordinary people' of the 99 percent. Bermeo and Bartels (2014: 4) summarise: 'dramatic political reactions to the Great Recession were associated less with the direct economic repercussions of the crisis than with government initiatives to cope with those repercussions'.

Moreover, a central feature of such political reactions is the widespread sentiment that austerity is an infringement of human dignity, demonstrated by the 15M movement's (a Spanish precursor to Occupy) slogan 'We are not products in the hands of politicians and bankers'. Anti-austerity protests are concerned with not only combatting public spending cuts but also with wider questions of democracy and humanity, in the face of neoliberalism which actively erodes these.

While large-scale European studies have been conducted which provide a wide-ranging picture of anti-austerity protests (see for example, Guigni and Grasso, 2015 and Della Porta, 2015), there is a need for in-depth research on the affective and cultural dimensions of anti-austerity activism within particular contexts, which is the contribution that this

thesis intends to make. Given movements' underlying concerns with questions of human dignity and normative ideals of how society should function, it is crucial to research these dimensions. Indeed, a resounding feature of anti-austerity activism is the emotional framing of the situation by protestors who highlight that austerity is experienced affectively through individuals' lived and felt realities. Hitchen (2016: 103) contends that austerity 'is a series of atmospheres that envelop and condition everyday moments and spaces', and which affect individuals' possible field of actions. Similarly, Coleman (2016: 84) suggests that austerity can be understood as a 'mood [...] an environment within which people dwell' and which has the potential to 'enliven and flatten us'. Understanding austerity in this way enables us 'to consider how the economic is affective, and folded into the cultural [...] to explore how austerity is experienced and lived affectively in and through different bodies and subjectivities' (Coleman, 2016: 84). Brown et al (2013) connect the affective dimension of austerity to resistance against it, suggesting that such movements should be understood as a response to a 'crisis of care'. They contend that movements approach this crisis in different ways, either criticising the government's lack of care shown to its citizens by cutting public services or/and by seeking to demonstrate how alternative social relations based on care are possible. Again, we see how moments of crisis can open up spaces for reimagining possible, better, futures. By focussing on the cultural and affective dimensions of movements, the processes of these alternative spaces are revealed.

This thesis aims to contribute to social movement theory by providing critical and nuanced 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of local anti-austerity activist cultures, exploring participants' lived experiences and meanings of political engagement. While research into lifestyle activist cultures has been previously carried out (Portwood-Stacer, 2013), the context of anti-austerity activism problematises the role or even existence of an 'activist' identity, given the populist framing of the

movements' participants as 'ordinary' people, or the '99 percent'. Further, anti-austerity activism is a rich site for investigation into contemporary social movements given that anti-austerity movements are 'new old social movements' which share a number of characteristics with so-called 'old' social movements in terms of addressing inequality, struggling for social justice, and socio-economic rights, but do so in a 'new form determined by the contemporary post-industrial, neoliberal context' (Giugni and Grasso, 2015: 12). Anti-austerity movements therefore speak to long-standing debates regarding the distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements.

What's more, questions about the role of the activist identity are confounded by the tendency for anti-austerity movements, such as UK Uncut, to be constituted by loose horizontal networks that have no official membership. To what extent does the absence of a clear organisational structure impact on the movements' ability to build a strong collective identity? Further, questions are raised about the role of affective aspects of political engagement such as solidarity, as well as how such activism is sustained over a period of time within such horizontal networks. Indeed, a strong collective identity has traditionally been seen as a key way of sustaining political participation, particularly during difficult times. The question arises, then, of what motivates *and* sustains individuals to participate in anti-austerity activism, especially when we consider that at the time of the research, four years had passed without any 'success' in combatting public spending cuts. In order to answer these, and other, questions, I contend that it is vital to develop an in-depth, focussed exploration of the ways in which citizens become active during such times of crisis, and in particular, the affective and cultural dimensions of everyday political engagement. Here, I am invoking Alexander's (2003: 7) notion of 'cultural sociology', which perceives culture to be 'not a thing but a dimension, not an object to be studied as a dependent variable but a thread that runs through, one that

can be teased out of, every conceivable form'. The purpose of cultural sociology is to explore the construction of meanings and to make the previously invisible, visible (Alexander, 2003: 4).

In addition to developing a cultural and affective approach, there is a need to develop a theory of social movements that explores the role of gender at all stages of movement activities, and particularly gendered differences *within* movements and *between* activists. McAdam (1992: 1214) highlights how:

Sociology often assumes a 'single society' with respect to men and women, in which generalisations can be made about all participants, yet men and women may inhabit different social worlds, and these must be taken into account.

In fact, Einwohner et al (2000: 682) contend that 'social movements are gendered on all of these levels: individual, interactional, and structural'. Therefore, Kuumba (2001) proposes using a 'gender lens' to incorporate the structure of gender into all elements of analysis of social movements in order to make gendered differences and their implications more visible. Similarly, Roseneil (1995), Charles (2000), and Taylor (1999) draw attention to the absence of gender within mainstream social movement theory and the need to incorporate feminist analyses into this theory, as well as to develop an approach to studying movements that takes account of gendered structures. Such an approach is particularly pressing within a context where women are bearing the brunt of the public spending cuts. Women suffer 75 percent of the tax and benefit cuts with, on average, one fifth of women's income being made up of welfare payments compared to one tenth of men's (Fawcett Society, 2013). Further, women are subject to the 'triple jeopardy', losing not only public services and jobs, but being left to fill the newly created service gap, unpaid (Fawcett Society, 2012). There is a risk that previously public issues such as social care are reverting into the private, and assumed to

be women's, domain, and that the boundaries between the public and private spheres are being remade and solidified. Rather than witnessing a 'detraditionalisation' of gender norms and roles with the rise of an increasingly individualised, fluid society (Beck et al, 1994), it appears that we are in fact seeing a 'retraditionalisation' of these roles and norms (Gill, 2008), which has obvious implications for women's lives. Thus, austerity reverses feminist gains, including women's access to the public sphere and paid work, which provided financial autonomy, and entrenches care work as unpaid, 'women's work'. As, Hall (2011) asserts, drawing on Beatrix Campbell:

[C]utting the state means minimising the arena in which women can find a voice, allies, social as well as material support; and in which their concerns can be recognised. It means reducing the resources society collectively allocates to children, to making children a shared responsibility, and to the general "labour" of care and love.

It becomes clear that austerity is a feminist issue given its direct and disproportionate impact on women and its implicit reinforcement of wider gender roles and norms. In order to explore the gendered implications of austerity and its resistance, I invoke a feminist approach which pays attention to the subjective, lived experiences of individuals and apply a gender lens to the study of anti-austerity movements, thus contributing both to feminist and social movement theory, as well as the crucial space where they overlap. Such a study is vital given that, at the time of writing, only 29 percent of MPs are women and that the UK government neglected the statutory requirement to consider the equalities impact of its policies when austerity measures were drafted in 2010, resulting in women and ethnic minorities being disproportionately affected (Pearson and Elson, 2015). We need to develop local case studies of the impacts of austerity and its activist responses on the ground, like those conducted by the Fawcett Group (East London Fawcett Group,

2013) and Coventry Women's Voices (Sandhu et al, 2013). This thesis seeks to contribute to such local studies by developing in-depth research on the affective and cultural dimensions of anti-austerity activism within Nottingham. Between 2010 and 2014, the City Council faced cuts of £123 million, with a further £30 million of cuts planned in 2015/16. As the City Council (2015) states 'we're facing budget pressures like never before'. In response, Nottingham has been particularly active in resisting austerity, with several local campaigns and groups of wider national movements, such as UK Uncut and the People's Assembly, having protested against the cuts from 2010 to 2015. Nottingham is therefore a rich site for investigating anti-austerity activism. My extended immersion in the local activist scene enabled me to gain access to participants and to develop a deeper understanding of the context.

Furthermore, Nottingham represents an intriguing research context for exploring the gendered dimension of anti-austerity activism. While the gendered nature of the cuts is reflected by feminist activism in some localities such as Bristol where, in May 2015, a group of young women organised a march of thousands against austerity (Bristol Post, 2015), within Nottingham there is a distinct feeling that anti-austerity campaigns such as the People's Assembly do not adequately address women's concerns, resulting in women not relating to such activism. In response, women form their own community groups to combat the gendered impacts of austerity by providing practical support to women affected by the cuts. This response provokes debate about the potential and problems of such approaches with the risk of social actors who provide such support becoming 'complicit with the imposition of austerity' (Bramall, 2016: 136). Clearly, localities vary in their consideration of the gendered nature of austerity, raising the question of why this gendered dimension is not present within Nottingham's main anti-austerity campaigns. By drawing on empirical data, this thesis proposes to answer this question, exploring the gendered exclusions and

barriers to activism that exist, potential solutions to these, and the complex relationship between activism and care.

Finally, it is important to note that just as it is bounded to a particular location, this research is also a 'snapshot' of a particular historical moment. While this moment has been recognised as epoch-making, indeed, Castells et al (2012) note that we are entering a world with very different social and economic conditions than before the financial crisis of 2008, and Shannon (2014) raises the possibility that we are witnessing 'the end of the world as we know it', such temporal and spatial boundaries are nonetheless limiting. Therefore, we must be careful not to over-generalise from this particular 'snapshot', and also to recognise the limits within which it exists. Events have unfolded since the research period which shed new light on the thesis findings. The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader renewed interest in austerity politics and brought with it hope for a different, fairer, and more representative party politics (though this has now been overshadowed by the recent turn of events with the 'Brexit' decision for Britain to leave the EU). While not all of my participants would have turned to Labour with the election of Corbyn, the subsequent period following this research was certainly a marked contrast to the earlier time of disillusionment, distrust, and rejection of party politics during which the research took place. This thesis therefore tells the story of the distinctive moment preceding the election of Corbyn, when a strong resistance to austerity was nowhere to be found within party politics and the then-recent multiple crises of the economic and political realms opened up space for political participation outside of mainstream channels of engagement. By focussing in detail on individuals' everyday lived experiences and meanings of political engagement, exploring the affective and cultural dimensions of activism, this thesis reveals the planting of the seeds of political change that continue to grow.

Thesis structure

Chapter 2 provides theoretical context through a critical exploration of the literature, highlighting the central debates to which the thesis contributes. These include how we should define social movements within a network society, the long-standing debate about old and new social movements, the influence of new media technologies on contemporary movements, and the neglect of emotions in traditional social movement theory. It identifies the need to incorporate feminist analyses of social movements into mainstream theory and to develop a theory of social movements that fully takes gender into account. This chapter develops a cultural and affective approach to studying social movements, drawing on Alexander (2003, 2006) to explore what this entails and culminating in an explication of the theoretical foundations for studying activist cultures, drawing on Bourdieu (1986, 1992). It also draws on feminist literature about women's political participation and the relationship between care and activism in the context of austerity, which has been described as a 'crisis of care' (Brown et al, 2013). This foregrounds the development of a feminist approach to studying social movements that takes account of gender when researching experiences of political participation. Having identified the theoretical areas to which the thesis contributes, this chapter outlines the key features of austerity discourses in the UK and provides a detailed description of the political socioeconomic context, specifically neoliberal capitalism, out of which anti-austerity activism has emerged. The overall aim of the chapter is to provide a broad theoretical foundation for the following analysis which will draw on additional areas of literature as they emerge.

Having laid the foundations for a cultural, affective, and feminist approach that explores the making and practising of activist cultures and takes gender into account, chapter 3 provides a detailed investigation and justification of the research methodology. This involves an in-depth exploration of the underlying epistemological and methodological

assumptions of the research, focusing on feminist research practice and symbolic interactionism. I provide the broad research questions which informed the research and detail the methods used and why these were deemed the most appropriate for this study. Following this, I describe the sampling method used, how access was gained to the research site, and present demographic data for participants before explaining the data analysis processes used and engaging with questions of ethics.

Discussion of the research findings begins in chapter 4 which presents a detailed description of the local context and provides the background for the movements researched. Chapter 5 focuses on the central question of what motivates and sustains anti-austerity activism. Drawing on participants' narratives, I contend that it is a combination of emotions and normative ideals that motivates participants, focusing especially on the role played by empathy and caring. This chapter explores how morals and emotions combine to produce political action, with wider questions about humanity and dignity being raised by participants. These positive values are sharply contrasted to neoliberal capitalism which is perceived to not only oppose, but to actively erode such humanist values. At the same time, I demonstrate that participants draw on neoliberal ideas of responsabilisation to justify their activism, but suggest that they distinguish this from the negative effects of neoliberal ideology by emphasising the importance of the collective over the individual. Participants' focus on the social side of activism establishes the importance of the affective and cultural dimensions of political engagement and suggests that despite contrary expectations, solidarity is fostered within networked social movements and plays a central role in motivating and sustaining activism. Further, this chapter focuses on the quotidian dimensions of social movement participation, revealing the common-held belief that everyone can and should do activism, and that 'small acts' make a difference.

Chapter 6 draws out the tensions present in the notion that everyone can and should do activism, by exploring the barriers and exclusions that prevent individuals from engaging politically. This includes the reality that those who are hardest hit by austerity often do not have the resources to protest against it, as well as the continuing and heightening gendered barriers that exist which prevent women from becoming involved in the public sphere. In response, I demonstrate that women are forming their own feminist resistance to austerity and explore how this is problematic. Having explored the question of who *can* do activism, I turn to elucidate who *should* do activism, according to participants, where it emerges that there are different ‘types’ of activist, with the ‘authentic’ activist occupying the highest position in this hierarchy. This involves an interrogation of the distinction made between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’, which is significant within the context of a populist movement where anyone and everyone can participate (as outlined in the previous chapter). Threaded throughout this chapter is the concept of ‘privilege’ in terms of who can do activism, who can or should represent certain groups, and the ways in which the idea is invoked within the activist community. This chapter begins to explore how the activist identity is constructed, understood and performed (or resisted) by participants.

Chapter 7 builds on the tensions raised in chapter 6, focussing on the construction of the ‘ideal perfect activist’ identity and, what I have called, the ‘dark side’ of activism because of its negative effects and the fact that it is hidden from public view. This chapter explores the processes of making and practising activist cultures, and in particular, the negative aspects of these, including how the activist identity is maintained and policed by other activists through practices of shaming. I examine the implications of such practices, and of the ‘ideal perfect activist’ identity, focussing on ‘activist burnout’ and its relation to care (or a lack of it) within activist communities. I explore how the ‘ideal’ activist is defined in terms of the type and level of activism one does, and the ways this

construction is gendered, with women feeling guilty for “not doing enough” of the ‘right’ thing (direct action), reflecting the insidious and gendered nature of neoliberal responsabilisation discourses and how these infiltrate spaces of resistance. I demonstrate that underlying the construction of the ‘ideal activist’ identity are the dichotomies of talking versus action and online versus offline activism, where the latter is perceived to be superior to the former. In exploring these constructions, I examine the possibilities for overcoming gendered barriers and exclusions through the use of social media. Having begun the analysis chapters with an exploration of the positive motivating and sustaining aspects of activist cultures such as solidarity, community, and hope, this chapter illuminates the ‘dark side’ of activism by exploring the contradictory and problematic ways in which the activist identity is constructed and negotiated within activist cultures, and the obscured negative implications of this. Indeed, there are two layers to this dark side – the first is the recognised negative behaviours such as activist shaming through which individuals police others’ behaviour, and the second, deeper layer is the largely unnoticed, less visible, negative impacts such as the gendered guilt and anxiety that arise.

Chapter 8 returns to the initial research questions posed, demonstrating how the thesis has answered these and the original contributions made by the thesis, as well as potential directions for future research.

Overall, this thesis presents a critical in-depth analysis of local anti-austerity activist cultures, focusing on the affective and cultural dimensions of political engagement, and utilising a gender lens and feminist approach to explore the gendered aspects of social movement participation. The thesis thus firmly re-focusses social movement theory on the often neglected affective and cultural aspects of political participation, and crosses the boundary between social movement and feminist theory, exploring the space of overlap here. In line with feminist research practice, it is hoped that the findings of the research will enable

local activist groups to reflect on their practices, to begin communicating about ways to improve the negative aspects of activist cultures, as well as to acknowledge the positive elements. Therefore, the thesis utilises the research setting of anti-austerity activism in Nottingham to provide a nuanced, in-depth understanding of the making and practising of activist cultures, highlighting both the enabling and constraining factors that impact upon citizens' potential to become politically active during times of crisis.

Chapter 2: A Critical Review of Social Movements and the Public Sphere: Questions of Austerity, Feminism, and Dignity

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the theoretical background and justification for the thesis by positioning it within the wider conceptual landscape. To begin with, I will explore the key theoretical debates to which this thesis contributes, including that of new versus old social movements, the influence of new media technologies on social movements, and the role of emotions within social movement studies. From here I will identify the theoretical perspective for studying activist cultures, drawing on Bourdieu (1992). This will serve as the basis for developing an analysis of the affective and cultural dimensions of social movements. Critically, this chapter will highlight feminist critiques of mainstream (or ‘malestream’) social movement theory’s failure to recognise the importance of gender to theorising social movements. This will be linked to a wider discussion about the gendered exclusions that exist within the public sphere. In tackling these exclusions, I will engage with feminist literature about the role of care within society, applying this to the context of austerity, and suggest how we can interpret activism as care. Having laid the theoretical foundations of the research I will then explore the specific details of the case, focusing on the key features of austerity discourses within the UK and outlining the political and socioeconomic context out of which anti-austerity activism has emerged. The overall aim of this chapter is to present a broad theoretical overview of the key debates within which this project is grounded and to which it contributes. Therefore, discussions of additional literature will occur in subsequent chapters as research findings emerge.

Social movement theory: Old versus new movements

Broadly speaking, mainstream social movement theory can be categorised in terms of three distinct 'waves'. The first wave considered social movements as abnormal and irrational, and studied their emergence in order to prevent future movements occurring. This viewpoint has long been abandoned in favour of viewing social movements as 'politics by other means' (Goodwin et al, 2000: 69). However, the earlier positioning of social movements as 'irrational' resulted in a desire to distance social movement theory from emotions (which are traditionally conceived of as irrational). Indeed, the second wave was concerned with instead depicting social movements as collectives of rational actors engaged in instrumental action. One of the dominant theories here is Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), which focuses on how rational actors make calculated decisions to secure the resources required for mobilization. Further, second wave theories of collective action were largely grounded in a Marxist tradition which viewed movements in economic terms as the struggle between the working class (or the proletariat) and the ruling class, within an industrial society defined by production. In response to both this Marxist tradition and RMT, the third wave of social movement theory sought to develop an understanding of the symbolic and cultural features of newly emerging social movements post-1960s, especially within the 1980s and early 1990s. The dominant theory which characterises this third wave is New Social Movement Theory (NSMT). Given its prominence within social movement studies and the questions it raises for a case such as anti-austerity activism and about the role of gender in social movements, I will now discuss NSMT in more detail.

Although referred to as New Social Movement Theory, Buechler (1995: 442) notes that it is more accurate to consider new social movement *theories* given their diversity. Despite this, there are common features which enable us to use the overarching category of NSMT. To begin with,

NSMT emerged as a response to the perceived inadequacies of Marxist analyses of social movements. Theorists criticised Marxism's emphasis on the economic logic of capitalist production to the neglect of other social logics and its assumption that class is the most significant social identity. Instead, NSMT explores other motivations for action, especially those rooted in ideology and culture, as well as other forms of social identity that influence collective action including gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. In doing so, NSMT opens up groups' conflicts and identities from being solely structural to consider the complex social processes through which such conflicts and identities are constructed, demonstrating the importance of symbolic action within the civil sphere (Melucci, 1989).

Melucci (1996: 9) contends that 'in contemporary societies [...] power operates through the languages and codes which organize the flow of information'. Social movements must therefore interrupt and challenge the dominant codes in order to exercise power. Similarly, Alexander (2006) argues that it is through the subversion of dominant discourses that social movements can exercise power. As he (2006: 294) remarks, 'as long as there is some autonomy for the civil sphere of society, however, power can be seized only indirectly, by influencing, and only in this sense gaining control over, the discourses and institutions of civil society itself'. Further, Melucci (1984: 830) stresses the importance of social movement cultures, asserting that collective identity is not merely a strategy to achieve certain ends but a goal in itself: 'since the action is focused on cultural codes, the *form* of the movement is a message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant patterns'. NSMT therefore enables us to consider the cultural and symbolic aspects of collective action, as well as the social processes of political engagement that occur at the micro and meso levels, which risk being neglected in favour of focusing on rationality and the macro, structural level of collective action.

Moreover, NSMT connects the micro and meso levels of analysis to the macro-level by situating social movements within the sociohistorical moment from which they emerge and considering the impact of this context. It is here that we see the emergence of two of the key features which distinguish 'new' social movements from 'old' movements, namely, what social problems they are concerned with and who constitutes movements. It is argued that while 'old' social movements emerged within an industrial context and were thus concerned with material questions of wages, wealth distribution, and class relations, 'new' social movements emerged within a post-industrial, post-material age where a shift has occurred towards post-material values and conflicts about identity, lifestyle, and culture. What's more, it is argued that this shift in the socioeconomic landscape resulted in a change in who participates in social movements, with the emergence of a new highly educated middle class usurping the working class participants and concerns of 'old' movements, within the context of a post-industrial society centred around the production of knowledge and information, rather than material goods. On the whole, then, 'new' social movements are considered to represent a break from 'old' movements because of their concern with post-materialist values, identities, and lifestyle over material and class interests, and their middle class constituency which distinguishes them from traditional working class movements (or, in simple terms, the questions of 'what' conflicts they are concerned with and 'who' participates).

However, this distinction between old and new social movements has been repeatedly questioned. Indeed, Diani (2000: 387) remarks that 'what is "new" about new social movements is far from a new question'. Critics tend to focus on demonstrating that there is in fact nothing 'new' about so-called new social movements or that social movements still represent 'old' concerns (Martin, 2015). As Buechler (1995: 448) asserts, critics of new social movement theory 'suggest that new social

movements are continuous with past movements and are simply the latest manifestation of a cycle of a long wave of social protest movements'. In response, NSM theorists contend that these movements are distinct not only because of what they are concerned with and who constitutes them, but also because of *how* they articulate their struggles, namely outside of mainstream political institutions (Dalton et al, 1990). However, regardless of whether new social movements represent something new and distinct from old social movements, the term is problematic because of the way it obscures continuities between old and new movements and overstates the differences between them. As Buechler (1995: 449) notes:

The term had a strategic value in trying to break from the Marxist tradition of looking to the "old" labor movement as the primary agent of history, but the unintended result of shifting the focus to other constituencies has been to imply that they somehow have no history prior to the cycle of protest in the 1960s.

Moreover, while NSMT's focus on the cultural aspects of social movements has been valuable in opening up a new area of social movement studies, an overemphasis on lifestyle issues and identity has resulted in social class and capitalism being forgotten. It is here that anti-austerity activism provides an intriguing case, for the movements represent a direct challenge to capitalist logic and raise questions about the role of class, both in terms of how the movements frame their struggles as well as their constituency. Della Porta (2015: 23) contradicts the notion that contemporary movements are largely constituted by the middle class, noting that within the European context, research 'signals the presence of a coalition of various social actors which tend to identify themselves as belonging to the lower classes'. She asserts that it is the people who are directly affected by austerity who participate, reflecting

Habermas' (1998: 365) contention that problems should be raised and discussed by 'those who are potentially affected'.

At the same time, Della Porta (2015: 79) draws attention to the populist character of anti-austerity movements in the vein of Laclau (2005), she defines populism as a 'political logic [...] the naming, the construction of the people as a way of breaking order and reconstructing it'. She demonstrates throughout her research that those protesting against austerity proclaim "we are normal, common people" (p.100), a claim which is most evident in Occupy's "we are the 99 percent" sentiment (though there have been criticisms about the actual make-up of the movement, which I will not go into here). In this respect, Peterson et al (2013: 18) contend that anti-austerity protestors 'take a political power approach to class which saw society divided between two opposing classes: a "them" representing an economic elite and a political elite and an "us" that are the unjust victims'. Therefore, anti-austerity movements challenge NSMT's assertion that a specific target in the form of a privileged class no longer exists within a post-material world. Indeed, we could interpret protestors' framing of 'us versus them' in terms of traditional class struggle and Marxist broad understandings of the working class as those who do not own the means of production in opposition to the elites who do. However, it could also be a deliberate decision not to differentiate between the working and middle class but to regard these identities as united 'in a common struggle against the "upper" class of "them"' (Peterson et al, 2013: 18). Certainly, despite stating that the majority of participants identify as the lower classes, Della Porta (2015: 54) remarks that 'what activists as well as observers stressed the most, was the extraordinary social diversity in the protestors' backgrounds'. Therefore, this political power approach to class which utilises a broad framing of 'us versus them' complicates our understanding of who participates in anti-austerity movements in relation to social class.

It appears that class is no longer a clearly defined or understood system of categorisation but has become more intricate with the increasing complexities of the modern post-industrial society. Crucially, this is not a reason to remove class from our analysis of social movements, but a call to reinterpret how we understand social class. Rather than perceive class as either purely material or solely subjective, Fuchs (2005) seeks to identify an objective definition of class that reflects this change in society. He invokes Bourdieu's (1986) 'species' of capital, including economic, cultural (resources such as education and qualifications), and political capital, proposing that these are distributed among individuals and groups in different amounts. Therefore, while overall, the volume and composition of 'total capital' reflects one's class position (i.e. those who possess a large share of economic, cultural, and political capital dominate those with less), Fuchs (2005: 3) also recognises that within classes there is a differentiation of capital distribution, resulting in a 'hierarchy of class fractions'. In testing this model, he (2005: 11) finds that:

[C]lass and social movements no longer coincide, movements are made up by people stemming from different social classes, people from classes endowed with high cultural capital are more likely to engage in protest than others.

At first glance, this statement seems contradictory, as traditionally, it tends to be the middle class who possess more cultural capital, and thus if those with more cultural capital are more likely to participate, we would expect movements to be largely constituted by the middle class, as NSMT posits. However, in recent years we have witnessed the rise of a class of individuals who are often highly educated (and thus possess high levels of cultural capital) but lack job security or employment opportunities because of the current socioeconomic climate, rendering them in a 'precarious' position (Della Porta, 2015). Here, we see a clear example of how social class has transformed and become more complex

in recent years. Reinforcing Fuchs' (2005) contention that those with higher levels of cultural capital are more likely to participate in movements, there has been increasing participation in anti-austerity movements by this highly educated but insecurely (un)employed class (Della Porta, 2015). Furthermore, Fuchs (2005) draws our attention to the role played by different species of capital within protest – a point which I will return to when discussing activist cultures and which is pertinent to social movements that develop within the context of an information society.

So far, I have explored the relationship between NSMT and class, as despite NSMT's claim that NSM are no longer rooted in class struggle, there remains a concern in the literature with the class basis of such movements (the 'new' middle classes of highly educated individuals); as Offe (1985: 833) states, their politics is 'the politics of a class but not on behalf of a class'. I have identified that NSMT recognises the importance of structural changes in the historical context within and from which movements emerge and that the questions at the root of NSMT are 'who' participates and 'what' movements' concerns are. Yet, despite this, there has been a glaring omission from NSMT – gender. Firstly, Charles (2000: 32) points out that while attention has been paid to how participants of NSM are the new middle class, there has been less notice of the way in which women comprise NSM as 'mothers, sisters and partners, [who] far outnumber men as clients of social services. Their experience thus predisposes them towards action.' Relatedly, Roseneil (1995) draws attention to NSMT's neglect of changes in gender relations, remarking that despite NSMT's attention to economic restructuring and the historical context, 'there is little to no mention of one of the most significant economic changes of the post-war period – women's entry into the labor force' (1995: 16). This significant change impacts on who participates in social movements as well as what their concerns are as 'old' social movements tended to be made up of working class men who,

unlike women at the time, had access to the labour force. While the shift in the class basis of such movements has been recognised, the corresponding shift in gender, with an increase in women participants, has remained under-theorised by NSMT. Charles (2000: 45) reinforces this, noting how ‘the changes that are invoked [by NSMT] are changes in capitalism, industrialism or modernity, there is not mention by any of the NSM theorists of changes in gender relations and thus no means of explaining the emergence of feminist social movements’. Furthermore, Dorothy Smith contends that NSMT’s argument that material production has been replaced by the production of signs is gendered (and classed), with men of the non-labouring classes being able to abstract themselves from the material production of daily life, something which is not so easy for women and the labouring classes (Smith, 1988, cited in Charles, 2000: 45-6). Similarly, Charles (2000: 48) remarks that NSMT’s suggestion that social movements are now oriented towards civil society rather than the state is inappropriate for women’s movements of the 1970s and 1980s where politics and the state, as well as cultural innovation, were central. It appears, then, that women’s movements are problematic for NSMT precisely because they straddle both so-called ‘old’ and ‘new’ movement concerns. This is recognised by Touraine and Habermas who seek to solve the problem by not considering such movements as (new) social movements at all (Charles, 2000: 47), though this solution is clearly inadequate.

Likewise, having outlined the key debates surrounding NSMT and suggested the need to bring class back into the discussion, we arrive at the question of whether anti-austerity movements fit satisfactorily within this category of ‘new’ social movement. Most obviously, anti-austerity movements have emerged within a post-material and post-industrial socioeconomic context and utilise strategies outside of mainstream political institutions, which align them with new social movements. However, in terms of the movements’ constituencies, despite evoking

populism, Della Porta (2015) demonstrates that participants within anti-austerity movements tend to identify as the 'lower classes' and are those who are affected by austerity. This distinguishes anti-austerity movements from 'new' movements which are perceived to be constituted mainly by the middle classes. Furthermore, despite not relating to class relations in traditional terms, as was the case in 'old' social movements, anti-austerity politics is concerned with material questions of redistribution and welfare, implying that when it comes to the types of topics addressed, anti-austerity movements fit within the 'old' movement category. Yet, as we shall see later, the movements' concerns are wider than this and constitute what has been termed 'post-materialist' values, such as morality and humanism. Given the complexity of who takes part and what topics the movement is concerned with (in other words, the answers to the original 'who' and 'what' questions posed at the beginning of the section), it is clear that anti-austerity activism, like women's movements, does not fall into either the 'new' or 'old' category of social movements. Reflecting this, Giugni and Grasso (2015: 12) suggest that anti-austerity movements are 'new old social movements' which share a number of characteristics with 'old' social movements in terms of addressing inequality, struggling for social justice and socio-economic rights, but do so in a 'new form determined by the contemporary post-industrial, neoliberal context'. We arrive at a point, then, where NSMT's division of so-called 'old' and 'new' movement concerns reveals the theory's inadequacies for understanding movements such as women's movements and anti-austerity movements. It is here that Fraser's (2013) discussion of the politics of redistribution and recognition, and its specific relevance for considering questions of gender in social movements, is useful.

Fraser (2013: 160) acknowledges that the shift that has occurred 'over the last thirty years, from quasi-Marxist, labor-centred understandings of gender to culture and identity-based conceptions coincides with a

parallel shift in feminist politics'. Where once, concerns in feminist movements were focussed on labour and violence, gender struggles have increasingly become about identity and representation. Problematically, 'the effect has been to subordinate social struggles to cultural struggles, the politics of redistribution to the politics of recognition [...] [which has] dovetailed all too neatly with a hegemonic neoliberalism that wants nothing more than to repress socialist memory' (Fraser, 2013: 160). Thus, Fraser draws attention to the very real risk of undoing the economic and political gains made by earlier feminist movements through replacing the earlier focus on distribution of material resources with a focus on recognition of difference and identity. Critically, Fraser (2013) asserts that the distinction drawn between the politics of redistribution and recognition is a false antithesis that needs to be undone by forging a theory and movements that combine the two concerns. She uses the example of gender as a 'two-dimensional concept' to demonstrate this. Fraser (2013) contends that rather than viewing gender through either the lens of distribution, as a political economic category, *or* through the lens of recognition, as an identity and status, we need to view gender 'bifocally – simultaneously through two lenses' (2013: 162). Doing so enables us to conceive of gender as a two-dimensional category concerned with *both* politics of redistribution and recognition and to thus make claims for both. She recognises that these categories exist independently of each other, and that the question may arise of which is more important (though this is not her focus), but, crucially, she asserts that the two types of politics (or, in NSMT's language, so-called 'old' and 'new' concerns of movements) are not antithetical. Fraser's (2013) theory thus offers us a useful way of understanding the concerns of movements such as the women's liberation movement and anti-austerity movements.

So far, I have discussed NSMT, explored the value of the distinction it makes between so-called 'old' and 'new' social movements, its neglect of gender, and how class has been redefined in recent times. Despite being

an initial proponent of 'new' social movement theory, Melucci (1996) raises a further criticism of NSMT – that it commits the epistemological error of conceiving of social movements as external, unitary objects. Instead, he (1996: 13) argues that 'what is in fact in question are heterogeneous and fragmented phenomena'. Likewise, Chesters (2012) asserts that social movements should be regarded as interactions between actors on many different levels. In this sense, then, social movements are 'objects of knowledge constructed by the analyst only' (Melucci, 1996: 21). While there is certainly merit in focussing on the everyday movement cultures that emerge, which I will return to, and Melucci's approach accurately reflects the heterogeneity of contemporary movements, he commits the same error of other NSM theorists, similar to that identified above by Fraser's (2013) discussion of the politics of redistribution and recognition, and overemphasises the symbolic aspects of movements to the neglect of the material. Instead, Castells (2012) offers a theory of contemporary social movements that are characterised by diversity and clearly situated within the information society but brings the material dimension back into analysis. I now turn to explore this approach before developing an affective, cultural, and feminist approach to studying social movements.

Networked social movements

In response to movements such as the Arab Spring which combined the use of communication technologies and public spaces for political protest, Castells (2012: 15) has argued that we are witnessing the emergence of 'a new species of social movement', which he calls 'networked movements'. Such movements tend to be leaderless, organised online, with no official membership but a 'network' of connected individuals that may be dispersed geographically. Though we should be careful when asserting the 'newness' of movements (as demonstrated above), 'networked movements' appear to share distinctive features that were not previously prominent. The most obvious of these

is how they harness the power of online networks for political mobilisation, raising questions about the role and use of the Internet, and particularly social media, within contemporary movements. The term 'networked movements' emphasises their 'rhizomatic' character with multiple connections and roots, reflecting the way such movements tend to be organised horizontally rather than vertically (Castells, 2012: 15). This reflects a shift from traditional hierarchically structured organisations and how the Internet provides people with new communicative possibilities 'that are suggested by horizontally rather than vertically organised information structures' (Stevenson, 2003: 184).

In fact, it has been argued that 'new media technologies such as the Internet are [...] serving as a new basis for a participatory democratic communication politics' (Kellner, 2000). Castells (2009) contends that the rise of mass self-communication provides the medium for people to build upon their autonomy and challenge established institutions. Whilst the media has traditionally been seen as a one-way process, with the audience passively receiving messages, the Internet provides the possibility for an active audience who can respond to the messages that they receive and even construct their own knowledge (Downing et al, 2001). It appears that the public, dissatisfied with the way the political system is currently organised, are utilising the Internet to find new ways to intervene in politics. UK Uncut (2010) reinforces this, arguing that 'we have proved that there is anger at these cuts, that the idea of mass apathy is a myth and that people are willing to do more than just join a Facebook group to stand up and defend what they believe in'. This statement demonstrates that while the Internet is being used for open discussion, it is also being used to organise political activism offline. Indeed, Castells (2012) stresses the significance of public spaces and how these interact with communication technologies, reflecting the need to consider both online and offline arenas of political action. Similarly, Gerbaudo (2012) demonstrates the need to consider not only both

dimensions of political action (online and offline) but also how the two interact. He (2012: 2) explores the ‘intersection of “tweets and the streets”, of mediated communication and physical gatherings in public spaces’. Notably, Gerbaudo (2012: 14) stresses how online activism ‘entails the *symbolic* construction of a *sense of togetherness*’ which generates affect amongst groups. Likewise, Papacharissi (2015: 7) explores how affect is produced within networks on Twitter, examining ‘what these mediated feelings of connectedness do for politics and publics networked together through the storytelling infrastructures of a digital age’. In the same way, Castells (2012: 173) highlights how Occupy utilised the ‘power of personal narrative’ by using Tumblr for people to tell their stories online. He suggests that this process ‘humanizes’ the movement and, like Papacharissi (2015) and Gerbaudo (2012), Castells (2012: 225) contends that ‘horizontal multimodal networks, both on the Internet and in the urban space, create togetherness’. We start to see here the centrality of everyday experiences, ideas of humanity, and emotions – topics I will explore throughout this chapter.

However, critics contend that rather than foster a sense of togetherness, the Internet contributes to the fragmentation of the public sphere and leads to political apathy. This is partly because the Internet is perceived to foster ‘weak social ties’ rather than the ‘strong ties’ that are required for activism (Gladwell, 2010). In this respect, social media produces bridging social capital, ‘which is characterised by weaker, but more widely diffused networks of reciprocity’ rather than bonding social capital which concerns deeper relationships within groups that provide ‘necessary social and psychological support and a sense of belonging’ (Skoric et al, 2009: 417). The effect of this, according to Putnam (2000), is that people are less likely to participate politically. However, it is worth noting that Putnam defines political participation in traditional ways including voting, signing petitions, and membership of local associations. Therefore, it could be the case that whilst traditional forms

of political engagement are falling in popularity, within the current context of disillusionment with party politics, other forms, such as networked movements are emerging. Moreover, as demonstrated by Gerbaudo (2012), Castells (2012), Melucci (1996), and Della Porta (2015), such networked movements create and sustain collective identities and solidarity within the context of an increasingly fragmented and heterogeneous society, often mobilising emotions.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that online discussion forums represent little more than radical enclaves speaking to themselves, and as such they lack any wider impact, but contribute to the fragmentation of civil society 'with public spheres veering toward disparate islands of political communication' (Dahlgren, 2005: 152). Indeed, Habermas' main criticism of the Internet is that the publics produced by it 'remain closed off from one another like global villages' (1998: 120-1). Further, Sunstein (2001: 16) contends that such fragmentation can lead to more dangerous 'group polarization' where people encounter less diverging opinions and instead remain within their own corners of the Internet 'listening to louder echoes of their own voices'. Notably, a key element of Habermas' critique is the fact that such activities take place within the 'closed-off privacy of the home' rather than a public space (1998: 163). Again, then, we see concerns about the role of public space within political engagement, concerns which are particularly pressing within the context of online activism and neoliberal hegemony which seeks to privatise public spaces.

Within the context of the linguistic turn in Sociology, Kohn (2003: 2) fosters debate about the continuing importance of physical place in political experience. Kohn echoes my earlier criticisms of Melucci's (1996) theory of social movements about the absence of the material dimension of social life. She (2003: 3) contends that public spaces are 'crucial to democracy' as they provide a physical method of organising people as well as a symbolic element concerned with collective thinking and action. Therefore, it is important to remember that 'space is also

lived and experienced. It has a corporeal as well as a symbolic or cognitive dimension' (2003: 3). Likewise, Castells (2012) emphasises the continuing importance of material public spaces, referring to the centrality of Tahrir Square in the Arab Spring as a meeting place and centre of protest and political dissent. Whilst Castells (2012) acknowledges the role that new media technologies played in connecting individuals and sparking dissent, he argues that the Egyptian revolution would not have been possible without public spaces. As I previously argued, then, it is crucial that when considering the symbolic and cultural elements of social movements that we do not neglect the material dimensions.

Despite such evidence of the interaction between online and offline spaces of political engagement, critics of online activism worry that individuals will substitute traditional offline forms of political action with online forms that are ineffective. Here, so-called 'slacktivism' (emphasising the lack of effort involved) is perceived to be easy and to alleviate the guilt that individuals feel for not participating politically (Morozov, 2009). However, there are several key assumptions underlying this substitution theory which need to be interrogated and explored empirically. Firstly, it is assumed that people who engage with online activism do so as a replacement for offline activism which they would otherwise be doing. However, it could be the case that online activism is instead an additional layer to activists' participation. Loader and Mercea (2012) demonstrate that people who are the most likely to become involved online are those who are highly active offline. Furthermore, a key problem is how online activism is narrowly defined and understood. Critics in particular tend to refer to either email tactics and e-petitions or 'clicktivism', where one 'likes' a Facebook page or changes their Facebook profile picture to demonstrate support for a cause. This is problematic as it neglects the ways in which 'online activism' encompasses a wide range of activities including discussions, (offline) event organising, publicity,

group formation, spreading information, and raising awareness, among others. Therefore, throughout this thesis I will be referring to online activism as another form of activism that involves a diverse range of activities.

On the one hand then, new media technologies such as the Internet are extolled as holding the potential to transform political participation due to their ability to encourage citizens to become active. On the other hand, it is argued that these claims are overly optimistic and that new media technologies actually contribute to the fragmentation of the public sphere, producing radical enclaves that speak to themselves. It is important to distinguish between recognising technology's potential uses and reifying it to a position of power in and of itself (Downing et al, 2001). Whilst there is much debate about whether the Internet constitutes a 'virtual public sphere', I am primarily concerned with the interaction between online and offline political participation. I therefore will be exploring how online and offline spaces for political action are constructed by participants in relation to one another. A key question which emerges is the extent to which the Internet overcomes or heightens traditional exclusions and barriers to political participation in the public sphere. What's more, the topic and related literature about new media technologies is always evolving, in line with technological advances and how people utilise these. Therefore, conclusions drawn about the Internet are transient and situated within a particular time and place.

So far, I have explored the debate surrounding new and old social movements, suggesting that within this framework, anti-austerity movements are 'new old social movements' (Giugni and Grasso, 2015: 12) and have drawn on Fraser (2013) as a way of combining the politics of redistribution and recognition. I have also suggested that the distinction drawn between old and new social movements overemphasises their differences, obscures their continuities, and has resulted in the

problematic neglect of social class and gender. Drawing on Melucci (1996), I proposed that social movements should not be studied as unitary and stationary already-existing objects, highlighting that ‘social movement’ is an analytical concept applied by a researcher to heterogeneous actions. While I have praised Melucci’s (1996) focus on movement cultures, and will be exploring this further, I have contended that his analysis overemphasises the symbolic to the neglect of the material — a mistake which Castells (2012) avoids in his conceptualisation of ‘networked movements’. Given the ways in which UK Uncut is organised through the Internet, combining this with public spaces for political action, along with its horizontal structure, we can refer to UK Uncut as a ‘networked movement’. However, the other key anti-austerity movement which will be explored – The People’s Assembly Against Austerity – is structured in a more vertical manner, reflecting traditional organisational structures, and places less emphasis on the role of networks and social media. Therefore, this movement does not fit Castells’ (2012) definition of networked movements. Moreover, I will be exploring a diverse range of anti-austerity activism outside of and overlapping with these two key groups. Given the heterogeneity of the research setting and the lack of an over-arching clearly defined ‘movement’ (which is why I have referred to anti-austerity movements in the plural), combined with the epistemological decision to avoid conceiving of social movements as externally existing fixed and unitary objects, I will instead be referring to ‘anti-austerity activism’ throughout. Of course, there are issues concerning how ‘activism’ is defined and understood, and this is a key topic which this thesis will explore. For now, I am using a wide definition of activism that incorporates participation in protests, direct action, online petitions and campaigns, and community groups that are focused on resisting austerity. However, it is noted that the term is fluid and that this definition is open to revision.

This section has been concerned with outlining the central theoretical debates and relevant theories within social movement studies and identifying key gaps in the theory, beginning with an overview of the three ‘waves’ of social movement theory. As I noted at the outset, the second wave was concerned with distancing itself from theories of movements that perceived actors to be irrational and thus neglected the role of emotions. Here, the influence of the traditional binary construction of reason versus emotion persists, which ties emotion to irrationality, meaning that any concern with rationality presupposes the irrelevance of emotion (Goodwin et al, 2001). Notably, this binary construction is tied to other binaries including public/private and male/female, where the former is valued as superior and the latter is perceived to be inferior. Indeed, Goodwin et al (2001: 15) remark that emotions have ‘regularly fallen on the “bad” side of a number of prominent dichotomies in Western thought’. Further, Ahmed (2014: 3) notes that ‘feminist philosophers have shown us how the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body’. We start to see the connections between gender and emotion, two dimensions which require further theorising within social movement studies and which I will explore further in this chapter and seek to make visible through the research. While we have seen that Castells (2012) brings emotions into his theory of networked movements, I contend that his study of the processes of emotional mobilisation, its connection to morality, and the role of emotions more generally within political engagement, is under-developed. Further, Castells (2012), like many other social movement theorists, neglects to consider the role of gender in the emergence, organisation, and continuing of social movements. It is here that this thesis will make a contribution, by providing a cultural, affective, and feminist exploration of anti-austerity activism. Before exploring the role of emotions within social movement theory in more detail, I will briefly outline how I am defining emotion within this context.

The affective dimension of political engagement

Firstly, it is worth noting that there has been a recent emphasis placed on the role of 'affect' within social movements, particularly networked movements (as we saw earlier; for example, Papacharissi, 2015), and that this involves a distinction being made between emotion, feeling, and affect. Here, it is argued that:

Feelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social* [...] and affects are *pre-personal* [...] An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential [...] Affect cannot be fully realised in language [...] because affect is always prior to and/or outside consciousness' (Shouse, 2005: 1, 5).

Papacharissi (2015: 21) contends that emotion can be understood as the consciousness of affect and argues that:

It is essential not to confuse affect with emotion and feeling. While affect contains a particular energy, mood, or movement that may lead to particular feeling, and possibly the subsequent expression of emotion, it both precedes and sustains or possibly annuls feeling and emotion.

Such definitions and understandings of affect build upon Spinozist-Deleuzian ideas and clearly demarcate emotion from affect. However, an obvious criticism of this approach, which Papacharissi (2015: 17) acknowledges, is that the fluid nature of 'affect' results in the concept being too abstract and vague. More problematically, this distinction between affect and emotion serves to narrow our definition and understanding of 'emotion', privileging 'affect' over emotion. Here, a contrast is drawn between 'a mobile impersonal affect and a contained personal emotion', which 'can operate as a gendered distinction' (Ahmed, 2014: 207), echoing the previous gendered dichotomy of reason and emotion. Further, the focus placed by this recent 'affective turn' on

exploring 'how mind is implicated in body; reason in passion', ignores many previous years of feminist work on challenging the mind/body and passion/reason dualisms (Ahmed, 2014: 206). Because of this, I will not be distinguishing between emotion and affect but instead referring to both under the term 'affective', which I will use to refer to a more general cultural approach that explores the construction of meanings and the role of emotions and their effects within political engagement. Therefore, emotion is not referred to as solely subjective but also social, and active – 'doing' things, as Ahmed (2014) suggests. I will now explore the question of emotions within social movement studies and what a cultural and affective approach to researching political participation entails.

Social movements and emotions

We have seen that since the 1960s there has been a focus in social movement studies on explanations of collective action which assume that individuals are rational, calculating social actors concerned with the costs and benefits of political participation. Alongside this there has also been a focus on the macro, structural level of social movements. In response, we witnessed a cultural turn in social movement research beginning in the 1980s with theories of framing and New Social Movements and continuing in the 1990s with a focus on narratives and discourse. However, this cultural turn has its limitations, indeed, Ullrich et al (2014: 1) observe that while culture 'has become a very prominent concept in social movement research', it is 'frequently used as a simple addition to existing models rather than as an approach in its own right'. Because of this, such theories tend to invoke a narrow definition of culture. Instead, it is argued that a broader notion of culture, such as that identified by Alexander's (2003) 'cultural sociology', should be utilised. In this respect, culture is perceived to be 'not a thing but a dimension, not an object to be studied as a dependent variable but a thread that runs through, one that can be teased out of, every conceivable form' (2003: 7). The purpose of cultural sociology, then, is to explore the construction of

meanings and to make the previously invisible, visible (Alexander, 2003: 4). In a similar vein, Blumer (1969: 3, 39) argues that meanings are important 'in their own right' and should be explored in depth. It is therefore the researcher's task to 'lift the veils' that obscure what is happening in an area of social life.

Yet, Ullrich et al (2014: 3) note that the use of culture remains 'limited and fragmented' in social movement theory, with the focus tending to be on cognitive aspects such as framing and narratives rather than the emotional. Indeed, Jasper (1997: 98) asserts that 'the kind of culture that has been rediscovered so far is highly cognitive, with little attention to emotions or moral visions'. Similarly, Benford (1997: 419) notes that:

Those operating within the framing/constructivist perspective have not fared much better than their structuralist predecessors in elaborating the role of emotions in collective action. Instead, we continue to write as though our movement actors (when we actually acknowledge humans in our texts) are Spock-like beings, devoid of passion and other human emotions.

This cognitive bias reveals an underlying assumption that emotion and thinking are two separate functions. In response, Jasper (2014: 25) argues that 'rather than the opposite of thought, emotions are forms of thinking, and as such are a part of culture mixed together with cognitive propositions and moral principles and intuitions'. Williams (1977: 132) highlights this intertwining of thinking and feeling, sidestepping the harsh opposition often constructed between the two: 'not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought'. Likewise, Alexander (2006: 53) draws attention to the role of feeling as well as thinking in political engagement and argues for an analysis of 'the critical role of solidarity'. Indeed, Durkheim (2002 [1925]: 85) emphasises the social aspect of morality as a key factor that strengthens groups internally and

suggests that the social and the moral always go together. Crucially, such a focus does not remove rationality but transcends the archaic dichotomy of reason versus emotion and instead puts forwards the notion that 'emotions underpin rather than contradict the rationality of action and that emotions are an integrated and sometimes explicit part of social movement activities' (Wettergren, 2009: 1).

Clearly, emotions are central to understanding the meanings shaped and shared by activists, raising questions about their absence from cultural approaches to social movement theories. While there is a methodological dilemma present in terms of how we can measure emotions, which influences this neglect of the emotional dimension, I agree with Jasper's (2014: 26) contention that this gap reflects lingering 'fears of the passions'. Further, as I alluded to earlier, the move to 'affect' instead of emotion perhaps also reflects this remaining connotation of emotion as irrational and an illegitimate area of study. It is notable that this emotion/reason dichotomy is linked to the dichotomies of female/male and private/public; as noted earlier, gender has been neglected in mainstream theories of social movements. Charles (2000: 29) links the private/public dichotomy to social movement theory's focus on class to the neglect of gender, contending that gender has traditionally been tied to the private while class is conceptualised as public. In order to overcome this division, she remarks that 'it is important to recognize that social movements, such as the labour movement, which are generally seen as representing class interests, also represent gender interests'. It seems that, like mainstream social movement theory's neglect of gender which is associated with the private/public dichotomy, a residual influence of the traditional emotion/reason dichotomy remains within social movement studies, revealing a further way in which SMT is implicitly gendered and ignores the 'feminine'. Della Porta (2013) points out that despite the current prominence of cultural approaches to social movement studies, researchers are still reluctant to

focus on emotions. Indeed Calhoun (2001: 52) argues that we need to transcend rather than reproduce this 'pervasive dualism' by integrating emotions into different aspects of sociological theory, including social movements. Furthermore, he (2001: 50) remarks that 'one of the advantages to taking emotions seriously is to see better how moral norms and injunctions come to have force', reflecting the interlinking of emotions and morality, and how these work together to produce action.

Indeed, Jasper (2014) draws our attention to the need to consider the moral dimension of protest as interconnected with the emotional. In fact, Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012: 41) contend that 'social movements may in many cases be conceptualised as moral movements. Typically, the activists involved in them try to confront and change not only their addressees' political opinions, but also the moral convictions informing these opinions'. Certainly, many of the different emotions which trigger protest are inseparable from moral sensibilities. Yet Goodwin and Jasper (2007: 629) note that 'the moral dimension of protest is often recognised but rarely linked to the emotions that make up such a large part of it'. There is a need, then, to pay closer attention to this moral dimension and how it interacts with the emotional within social movements.

There is one emotion in particular which can help us to better understand this connection between emotion, morality, and action — empathy. Todd (2004: 339) remarks that 'empathy is thought to embody both moral force and political possibility (cf Boler, 1999). Unlike other emotions, empathy is not simply considered to be one affective response among many, but it is seen to have ethical legitimation' in a way that other emotions do not. Empathy refers to the capacity to feel like another or, in simple terms, the ability to imagine 'putting oneself in the other's shoes'. It connects thought and feeling by translating an idea into a feeling through the use of the imagination. Empathy is a relatively recent Western word that draws on the traditional meanings of the Greek word 'sympathy', which means to feel or suffer with somebody.

Though the word itself is relatively new, this idea of 'feeling with another person' has a long history which can be traced throughout religious and philosophical traditions (Weber, 2011; Agosta, 2011). Given its ties to the historical use of the word 'sympathy', I will be exploring this tradition but using the term 'empathy' because its contemporary use more accurately reflects the traditional use of 'sympathy' and because the current popular understanding of 'sympathy' evokes ideas of pity, which imply a paternalism and condescension on the part of the empathiser.

Empathy, or its traditional ancestor, sympathy, is perceived to be a 'moral feeling' (Weber, 2011: 8) which thus becomes a key criterion for moral actions. Hume contends that the motivation for justice originates in sympathy which is not only a source of information about the other's experience, but also a 'force of morality' (Agosta, 2011: 9). Therefore, sympathy takes on the content of benevolence and is grounded in an interest in furthering humanity; Agosta (2011: 7) asserts 'Hume establishes sympathy as the glue that affectively binds others to oneself and, by implication, binds a community of ethical individuals together'. In fact, Slote (2010: 13) contends that empathy is the basis for an ethics of caring about those who are not kin, and thus the ability to empathise provides the 'cement of the moral universe'. Similarly, Kohut (1977) uses the metaphor of empathy being the oxygen which breathes life into the relationship between the individual and the other. However, while some theorists consider empathy to provide the reason for acting morally, Agosta (2011) draws attention to the fact that empathy simply means the ability to understand and feel with the other, which requires only that we listen to the other, not necessarily that we act to alleviate the other's suffering. Therefore, while empathy provides access to the suffering of the other, it is a separate step to then take action to reduce this suffering, and it is here that ethics enters. For Agosta, ethics combined with empathy produces action, for ethics tells you what to do about how the other feels rather than simply providing a window onto the other's

experience. Drawing on Levinas, Todd (2004: 338) suggests that ethically, we have a responsibility to the other *even when we cannot understand their experiences*. This point is crucial, because empathy assumes that through imagination we can understand the other's experience, which may not necessarily be the case. Therefore, in the absence of this understanding, we still need motivation for reducing the other's suffering, which can be provided by such responsibility. It is here perhaps that solidarity plays a role, as it implies unity among a group with shared responsibilities or interests, but without having to understand the other's experience. Thus, we can have solidarity with another because we recognise our shared humanity, vulnerability, and the possibility that the other's suffering could be experienced by ourselves, all of which are underlined by the responsibility that we each have to the other (Levinas, 1969). Overall, solidarity, empathy, morality, and ethics are closely intertwined, with their combination being the force that moves us from feeling to action. Therefore, it is worth further exploring the role played by such emotions and morality, as well as how they interact, within the context of a specific movement in order to better understand the affective dimension of how political action is motivated.

Indeed, a key question concerning Habermas' model of the public sphere is what motivates people to participate in politics. Stevenson (1995: 7) remarks that whilst a rational consensus model may be appealing, Habermas neglects to adequately explain *why* we should want to act rationally. When approaching this question, I argue that we need to pay attention to the affective dimension of political participation. Whereas the deliberative model of the public sphere encourages the putting aside of passions in order to render rational consensus possible, Mouffe (2005) argues that it is precisely those passions which require mobilising in order to produce democracy. However, Mouffe's (2005) theory overly focuses on conflict within the public sphere, and as Alexander (2006: 43)

asserts 'it is not only difference that sustains democracy, but solidarity and commonality'. Yet, Alexander (2006: 53) notes that there is a silence 'about the sphere of fellow feelings, the we-ness that makes society into society [...] and the processes that fragment it'. I intend to break this silence by exploring the processes of how solidarity and collective identities are created, as well as how they are threatened, within the context of anti-austerity activism. Such an investigation challenges the shift away from the study of collective identities within Sociology which we have witnessed with the rise in theories of reflexive modernisation that emphasise individualism above collectivism.

In order to develop an understanding of the processes of solidarity and collective identity, it is necessary to pay close attention to the lived experiences of individuals' day to day lives, investigating how such processes occur within a particular setting. Indeed, Alexander (2006: 115) contends that 'we need to develop a model of democratic societies that pays more attention to solidarity and social values – to what and how people speak, think and feel about politics than most social science theories do today'. This involves recognising the construction of symbolic codes that are drawn upon by groups and which form the basis of the narratives which communities construct (2006: 409). These narratives, Alexander (2006: 60) argues, 'guide their everyday, taken-for-granted political life'. A central part of translating traditionally abstract, normative concepts is to look at the concrete, everyday experiences of citizens and the symbolic codes that they invoke. Indeed, he (2006: 551) contends that 'rather than an abstract deduction of philosophers, the normative stipulations of civil society turn out to be the language of the street'. Drawing on Alexander (2006), this thesis will investigate the significance of the normative in mobilising political participation and the ways in which movements articulate such normative values in everyday language.

By drawing attention to the everyday lived experiences of political engagement, Alexander (2006) reminds us of the need to consider not only the initial engagement phase of movement participation, but also how participation is sustained day to day. Melucci (1996) asserts that 'latent' phases of social movement activity matter just as much as times of protest. Yet social movement literature tends to focus on how individuals become mobilised and are recruited to movements (Corrigall-Brown, 2012), which is the main place where emotions are mentioned. Instead, Goodwin et al (2001: 21) suggest, 'emotions also help sustain movements in their less active phases'. This highlights a further criticism of traditional rationalistic approaches to social movements, namely, their focus on strategy and effectiveness. Here a concern is with 'how' social actors become mobilised, rather than 'why' they do, where the affective dimension plays a central role. A key question that emerges, then, is the role of the affective in not only motivating but also in sustaining political engagement. In order to answer this, I contend that we need to explore wider activist cultures; indeed, Melucci (1989: 95) demonstrates the importance of studying social movement cultures which are 'submerged and woven into the fabric of daily life'. Again, then, we see the importance of paying attention to the everyday lived experiences of individuals who participate politically, as suggested by Alexander (2006).

Drawing on Melucci's (1996) understanding of movements as complex phenomena constituted by a plurality of meanings, which social relationships comprise, there is a need to explore the dynamism of these processes at the everyday level. In this respect, activist cultures are not a fixed 'definite datum, metaphysical reality, or a "thing" with a "real" essence' (Melucci 1988: 247, cited in Martin, 2015: 65), but active and continual processes of interaction. In a similar manner, Calhoun and Sennett (2007: 5) emphasise the need to explore how culture is 'practised', contending that:

Too often the sociology of culture takes on the static character of a sociology of cultural products. It is a study of paintings not painting [...] culture is practice: embodied, engaged, interactive, creative and contested.

Likewise, Thompson (1963: 9) stresses the *making* of the English working class. Emphasising the active process and effort involved he uses the word *making* because 'it is a study in an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making'. Thompson's (1963: 9) approach emphasises both relationships and the active processes involved in the making of cultures, as well as the need to pay attention to particular settings:

I do not see class as a "structure", nor even as a "category", but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships [...] [t]his relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context.

However, Thompson arguably neglects structure in his focus on agency and the relational aspects of class. Instead, Bourdieu's (1992) theory of practice reconciles agency and structure by combining the interconnection of individuals' dispositions (*habitus*), their position within a field (*capital*), and the state of play within a particular social arena (*field*). This is a simplified overview of the key elements of his theory, represented by the equation (*habitus*) (*capital*) + *field* = *practice* (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). Crossley (2002: 171) condenses Bourdieu's theory of practice by arguing that:

Social practices are generated through the interaction of agents, who are both differently disposed and unequally resourced, within the bounds of specific networks which have a game-like structure and which impose definite restraints upon them.

Crucially, Bourdieu offers ‘a theory of structure as both *structured* (*opus operatum*, and thus open to objectification) and *structuring* (*modus operandi*, and thus generative of thought and action)’ (Grenfell, 2008: 45). Bourdieu (1984, 1992) thus provides a theory which can aid understanding how specific activist cultures are constituted and their dynamics or, in other words, the processes of ‘making’ and ‘practising’ activist cultures. I will now expand upon the key concepts of Bourdieu’s (1992) theory of practice to demonstrate their usefulness for exploring activist cultures.

The complex notion of ‘habitus’ acts as ‘a hinge between agency and structure’ by explaining the ways in which individuals act in situations according to their pre-existing dispositions, schemas, and attitudes, which in turn are influenced by social structures (Crossley, 2002: 177). It entails the ‘embodied competence or know-how’ which provides individuals with a ‘feel for the game’ (Crossley, 2002: 176). There is a sense, then, that habitus forms and acts at an un- or sub- conscious level and is carried within one’s body. Demonstrating the way in which habitus connects agency and structure, Crossley (2002: 172) remarks ‘we make ourselves in particular ways, in response to the conditions we find ourselves in’. Intimately linked to habitus is ‘doxa’ which comprises the taken-for-granted practices which we perceive to be natural within a particular context. Both of these terms relate to the specific ‘field’, or social space, within which an individual participates. In order to understand interactions, we need to understand the social space within which they occur.

We can therefore conceive of an activist ‘field’ with its own shared discourses, rules, beliefs, and understandings, or activist habitus and doxa. Significantly, fields are ‘structured spaces that are organised around specific types of capital or combinations of capital’ (Swartz, 1997: 117), some of which I introduced via Fuchs’ (2005) discussion of class and social movements. Individuals compete for the possession of different

'species' of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) — economic (money and commodities), cultural (cultural goods and dispositions such as educational qualifications), symbolic (statuses and reputation), and social (connections which can be used to the individual's advantage). These forms of capital also interlink, for example possessing higher levels of cultural capital allows individuals to attain further goods and makes it easier to gain social and economic capital. Crucially, the value of symbolic and cultural capital is dependent upon the context or field and it is these two 'species' of capital which are most relevant to studying activist cultures. Significantly, fields are sites of struggle for control over the particular types of capital which are valued — as Grenfell (2008: 69) observes, accumulation of capital is at stake within fields, resulting in competition to maintain or improve one's position. Therefore, as the metaphor of 'game' suggests, fields are 'hierarchically differentiated' (Crossley, 2002: 179). Portwood-Stacer (2013: 5) demonstrates this in her research on lifestyle activist cultures, observing that relations of power exist between individuals based on their performance of lifestyle, 'as well as the ways in which individuals discipline themselves and their peers in line with accepted lifestyle norms'. Therefore, at stake here is symbolic and social capital in terms of activists' reputation and prestige within the wider group. In fact, Portwood-Stacer (2013: 21) suggests that 'subcultural capital' is awarded to those who abide by anarchist norms, which is defined by the extent to which an individual deviates from mainstream norms.

What's more, individuals 'struggle over the very definitions of what are to be considered the most valued resources in fields', reinforcing the conflictual nature of cultural fields (Swartz, 1997: 123). Portwood-Stacer (2013: 5) refers to the practice of 'politicking' over lifestyle, where individuals clash over the salience of certain values, resulting in a moral hierarchy where activists judge one another according to how well they live up to the perceived group norms. This provokes exploration into the

forms of capital which are the most valued within activist cultures, how these are defined and attained, and the ways in which competition over the accrual of capital plays out on the ground. Further, to what extent do these processes fracture solidarity?

Overall, Bourdieu's (1992) theory of practice, and particularly the concepts of 'field', 'habitus', 'doxa', and 'symbolic' and 'social' capital are highly useful for considering the processes of 'making' and 'practising' activist cultures. Such an approach shifts our focus away from instrumental questions of movement strategy and 'success' and, following Melucci (1996), enables us to explore the everyday interactions and relationships between activists, including the power dynamics at play, as well as the wider social space within which activist practices occur and from which protest emerges. As Crossley (2002: 181) contends, 'the concept of fields suggests *a model of movements in its own right* [...] we can appreciate that and how movements, insofar as they achieve any size and duration, can become sites of internal competition and "games"'. Such a study is vital to furthering our understanding of the motivating, and particularly the sustaining, factors of political engagement and action. Furthermore, it draws our attention to the cultural dimension of this engagement without neglecting wider structural forces and context. Indeed, cultural fields do not exist in isolation but have porous boundaries, permeating and being permeated by other fields, with boundary construction (and policing) being a further area of struggle. In particular, the issue of who is to be included within particular fields, and ergo who is to be excluded, is fought over, opening space for discussion about how individual and collective identities within activist fields are established and maintained, or achieved (Portwood-Stacer, 2013: 6). Therefore, questions are raised about how a common political identity is constructed within the context of anti-austerity activist cultures, given how the movements' participants frame themselves as 'ordinary people', and the '99 percent', which problematises where the boundaries are

constructed and what it means to be an activist within this context. Furthermore, the context of heterogeneous, loose, networked movements adds another layer to this, as again it is unclear where (or whether) boundaries exist, which provokes enquiry into the extent to which solidarity can be fostered and maintained. Indeed, while boundary construction and policing excludes people it also has the function of defining who belongs to a group, helping to build a stronger collective identity.

Notably, this approach recognises and explores the power relations between activists, which are often neglected when focusing on movements that seek to resist elite power. Indeed, Coleman and Bassi (2011: 205) remark that there is a tendency for social movement studies to look at power solely as ‘counter-hegemonic’ or ‘bottom-up’ which ‘obscures the ways in which power may be exercised *within* practices of resistance’. Moreover, power imbalances within movements often reflect and thus ‘bolster local and global forms of domination’, meaning that so-called resistance movements actually reinforce, whilst ostensibly fighting against, the status quo (Ibid).

Bourdieu (2001) explores a key power imbalance in society through his study of ‘masculine domination’. He analyses the ‘paradox of doxa’, which is how we respect the order of the world and take it for granted as given while it is continually constructed and reproduced by our own actions and despite its sometimes negative effects. Crucially, he contends that ‘the strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it’ (2001: 9). Similarly, feminist theorists have remarked on the ways in which the category of ‘universal abstract individual’, conceptualised in theories of citizenship, masks the dominance of white middle class males, a point which I will return to in the next section. Bourdieu’s (2001) analysis of masculine domination draws our attention

to the implicit ways that social life is gendered and provides a potential explanation for the absence of gender in mainstream SMT, as such gendered experiences and effects are masked by the wider 'doxa' of society that naturalises masculine domination, conceiving it as neutral.

There emerges, then, a concern with the often neglected emotional dimension of activism which is inextricably linked with moral and normative concerns. There is an emphasis on exploring individuals' lived (and *felt*) experiences of activism in their everyday lives and practices. At the same time, we must not neglect the collective dimension of engagement and explore the 'critical role of solidarity' (Alexander, 2006) within activist cultures. I have highlighted the need to explore the processes of political engagement that occur within movements and how individual experiences of political engagement may differ. This involves a detailed exploration of what I have called the making and practising of activist cultures, in the vein of Thompson (1963) and Calhoun and Sennett (2007). To do so I contend that it is necessary to invoke a cultural and affective approach that pays attention to the emotional aspects and the everyday lived experiences of political engagement. Furthermore, I have highlighted mainstream social movement theory's neglect of gender which raises the question of how we can develop a theory of social movements that not only considers the cultural and affective dimensions of movement engagement but also takes gender into account, in short, a feminist approach to studying social movements. I now turn to explore questions of gender and political participation in more detail, beginning with a discussion of traditional gendered exclusions from the public sphere from which I will discuss the relationship between gender and political participation more generally, before focussing on the specific context of anti-austerity activism which I will detail in preparation for the coming analysis.

Gender and the public sphere

I have identified the problematic distinction drawn between the public and private spheres and its relation to other binary constructions including reason/emotion and male/female, all of which have influenced the development of mainstream social movement theory. In order to better understand these constructions and the related absence of gender from SMT, as well as to break down these divides, it is important to consider their theoretical and historical context. Whilst such binary constructions have long existed, Habermas' (1989) theory of the public sphere is a key starting point for exploring questions of women's political participation because of its theoretical influence. Habermas' (1989) *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* laid the foundations for the theory of a deliberative public sphere which engaged in rational, critical debate about issues of public concern and the 'common good'. For the purposes of this thesis I will focus on gendered critiques of the exclusionary nature of Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere, using this as a foundation to discuss gender and activism and the related gendered nature of citizenship. Before engaging in such a discussion, however, it is important to clearly outline how I am defining 'gender'.

Following Connell (1987: 92), I am considering gender as a social structure which 'expresses the constraints that lie in a given form of social organization (rather than, say, physical facts about the world)'. From this perspective, the categories of 'male' and 'female' are socially constructed, with patterns of meanings, certain attributes, capacities, and dispositions being associated with each category (male or female). It is here that we see the introduction of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', which are constructed categories tied to particular bodies, as Connell (1987: 78) explains 'masculinity is not inherent in the male body, it is a definition given socially, which refers to characteristics of male bodies'. Multiple versions of masculinity and femininity exist, encouraging us to think and speak about these categories in the plural. Indeed, what has

traditionally been asserted to be ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, in reality reflects the hegemonic (or dominant), idealised, form of these categories, within a given historical setting (Connell, 1987: 69). Further, while the categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ are assumed to be natural and grounded in biological differences, this is not the case, as evidenced by the contradictory need to constantly assert what is ‘natural’ — as Connell (1987: 80) questions ‘if the difference is natural why does it need to be marked so heavily?’ Significantly, denouncing the biological basis for gender does not make gender and its effects any less ‘real’, indeed, Nixon (2013: 299) reminds us that ‘asserting their [the categories] invented status, however, is not to diminish the force of these categories over us’.

Having outlined my definition of gender and the associated qualities of masculinity and femininity, a further point must be made regarding the need to be cautious about speaking of ‘women’ as an homogenous, unified group. Mohanty (1987: 38, cited in Phillips 1991) warns that:

Universal sisterhood, defined as the transcendence of the “male” world [...] ends up being a middle-class psychologized notion which effectively erases material and ideological power differences within and among groups of women.

Here, attention is drawn to the differences between individual experiences within groups. As Eisenstein (1989: 4) asserts, the task is ‘to pluralize the meaning of difference and reinvent the category of equality’. Therefore, we must not be too eager to generalise from individual women’s experiences and should listen to the differences and complexities within gendered experiences of activism. There is no universal experience of ‘woman’, but individuals are judged and treated according to people’s perceptions of them as women. However, because of this, it is possible to speak of women as a category that corresponds to the social structures of gender. In other words, women are perceived to be a category and this perception influences the lives of those who are

perceived to be women, as demonstrated by the existence of the gender pay-gap. Therefore, while gender may be a social category, as Nixon (2013) states, it has real and material effects. Moreover, while it is important to pay attention to difference, this does not entirely negate the possibility of looking at shared, common experiences. Tanesini (1999: 145) asserts:

A recognition of differences among women should not automatically lead to the assumption that there is nothing useful to be said about women in general. A recognition of the importance of, say, race and sexual orientation in the lives of some women, does not mean that every feminist analysis of some aspect of social reality should focus on all these dimensions.

Tanesini (1999: 146) builds upon this, noting that abstracting from issues of race, for example, in order to focus solely on gender:

[D]oes not commit one to the view that there is an essence all women share. Similarly, we are not embracing essentialism when we abstract from all other features to claim of a group of people that they are all students in British Universities. This claim does not even commit one to the view that being a student means the same to each one of them. Nevertheless, it is still possible to say a few politically important things about these students.

Finally, it is noted that when referring to 'women's experiences' I am speaking about the opinions and experiences of those who self-identify as women. I will now explore the wider context of gender and the public sphere, from this perspective of gender as a social structure.

In his historical-sociological account, Habermas (1989) attempts to both outline the history of the bourgeois public sphere and to identify its

kernel of emancipatory potential (Calhoun, 1992: 2). Crucially, the emergent bourgeois public sphere challenged the principle of traditional feudal rule and created a new basis for authority: the consensus formed by the rational, critical debate of private persons coming together as a reasoning public (Habermas, 1989). Although limited to property-owning, male citizens in practice, Habermas argues that the bourgeois public sphere held within it the emancipatory potential for universal inclusion as it was based on Enlightenment ideas of universal participation (1989: 34). Indeed, Habermas (1989: 34) argues that the bourgeois public sphere rested on the normative ideal that people should be able to participate on an equal footing, with inequalities of status and difference being 'bracketed' so that it is the content of the argument that matters rather than the speaker.

However, Fraser (1992: 113) argues that the 'official' public sphere both rested on and was 'importantly constituted by a number of significant exclusions'. In contrast to Habermas, she presents a darker view of the bourgeois public sphere as ideologically masculine and highlights its many exclusions including women, working class men, and ethnic minorities. From this perspective, deliberation serves as a 'mask for domination' where 'such bracketing usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates' (Fraser, 1992: 113). Like Fraser, Phillips (1991: 57) contends that 'impartiality is not just a matter of abstracting from difference in order to identify a lowest common denominator. The very idea that there is a lowest common denominator [...] turns out to be weighted in favour of certain groups'. Crucially, she argues that the 'abstract individual' is a patriarchal category and that to accept this abstract, disembodied, individual is 'silently accepting his masculine shape' (1991: 36). Fraser (1992: 119) draws attention to the ways in which 'informal impediments' exist which prevent individuals from participating fully and equally, regardless of whether differences are successfully bracketed. She (1992:

126) remarks 'participation means being able to speak in one's own voice', which is not possible when classed and gendered modes of communication are discredited or ignored.

Moreover, rather than bracketing and ignoring inequalities, Fraser (1992) contends that it is precisely these differences and inequalities which should be addressed and challenged within the public sphere. She (1992: 124) argues for the existence of conflicting counter-publics, asserting that when they 'emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand discursive space'. Thus, Fraser (1992) illustrates that civil society is a dynamic space where tensions constantly play out between different interest groups, resulting in the pushing of issues previously deemed 'private' into the public domain (for example, domestic violence and abortion rights). It emerges, then, that there are two central forms of exclusion within the public sphere; *who* can enter the debate and *what* issues are addressed, both of which are fundamentally gendered.

It becomes clear that despite Habermas' (1989: 34) claims that the bourgeois public sphere held within it the emancipatory potential for universal inclusion, it was inherently gendered. Women were excluded based on the distinction drawn between the public and private arenas (Fraser, 1992). Lister (1997) contends that the construction of citizenship is underlined by the dichotomy of the 'public sphere', associated with 'men' and 'citizen' versus the 'private sphere' associated with 'women' and 'non-citizen'. The dichotomy of the 'male breadwinner' and the 'female home-maker' is produced, allowing men to enter the world of work while women remain in the private, domestic domain. In challenging this divide, attention has been paid to the sexual division of labour and the need for women to enter the paid labour market (Lister, 1997). However, this resulted in the 'double burden' where women perform both paid and unpaid work (Kremer, 2007). Additionally, the aim to increase women's paid positions reinforces the notion that paid

work is more valuable than unpaid work, and attempts to include women as citizens along the lines of the traditional, masculine conceptualisation of citizenship (Lister, 1997). Instead, Lister (2008: 323) contends that we need to 'reconceptualise citizenship in gendered terms in the image of women as well as men' by affording more attention and value to unpaid, care work.

We begin to trace the ways in which the gendered division between the public and private spheres influences various aspects of social life from work to citizenship and political participation. Indeed, Dodson (2015: 378) contends that 'gender organises the political sphere in ways that systematically constrain the ability of women to exercise their political voice'. While the bourgeois public sphere is an historical example, Beard (2014) demonstrates the current influence of the public/private boundary, noting that women's voices are still ignored or that, when heard, women are punished for speaking out. Beard (2014: 3) asserts that 'this is not the peculiar ideology of some distant culture. Distant in time it may be. But this is the tradition of gendered speaking – and the theorising of gendered speaking – of which we are still, directly or more often indirectly, the heirs'. Further, women are disproportionately represented within parliament with only 29 percent of MPs being women. Not only are women considerably under-represented at higher levels of political power, but when women do occupy political roles they are judged more harshly than their male counterparts, often in relation to their image (Ross, 2011). The democratic deficit combined with the treatment of women politicians clearly demonstrates the persistence of patriarchal and gendered norms about the role and character of women. Indeed, Einwohner et al (2000: 693) assert that:

Women have traditionally been ignored as political actors because femininity is associated with emotionality and passivity – characteristics that are thought to be at odds with

the “masculine” traits of toughness, aggression and objectivity believed necessary for political involvement.

We are reminded of the role of emotions in political engagement, and particularly the persistent influence of and the relationship between the traditional binary categories of public/private, reason/emotion, and male/female, where the latter is perceived to be inferior; thus problematising women’s contemporary participation in (or exclusion from) the political sphere. Given the focus of this thesis (anti-austerity activism) and the current context of disillusionment with party politics, or the crisis of responsibility (Della Porta, 2015), I am concerned with the relationship between gender and activism, which I will now explore further.

Gender and activism

Research has demonstrated that gendered barriers to participating in activism exist, with studies in the 1960s and 1970s revealing that women were less likely than men to participate in protest (Dodson, 2015: 378). Such studies focused on the recruitment stage of social movements, and discovered that women face significant structural availability barriers that prevent them from participating in protests. In other words, women tended to have more alternative commitments than men that limited their ability to participate politically. Moreover, these limits are tied to the gendered division of reproductive labour with women tending to be the main care-givers in a household and having the responsibility of maintaining the home, as outlined above in the traditional breadwinner/homemaker model.

However, this gendered gap in political participation is supposedly disappearing with women’s participation in social movements increasing (Cable, 1992: 35). Dodson (2015: 377) remarks that ‘an emerging theme in survey research highlights the declining and possible closing of the gender gap in protest participation’. Moreover, Lawson and Barton (1980)

contend that this increased involvement leads to women shedding traditional gender roles (cited in Cable, 1992: 45). Similarly, it has been suggested that in the wider context of an individualised and insecure society, traditional structures such as gender have become less relevant, resulting in the 'detraditionalisation' of society (Beck et al, 1994). The influence of this detraditionalisation thesis is evident within post-feminism, understood here as a 'sensitivity' in which a selectively defined feminism is both 'taken into account and repudiated' (Gill and Scharff, 2011: 4). Notably, there is a neoliberal emphasis placed on young women as individual agents who make autonomous choices but who are at the same time subject to increasing self-surveillance, monitoring, and discipline (Gill and Scharff, 2011). Gill and Scharff (2011) explore the relationship between neoliberalism and post-feminism within a context where gender is perceived to be less relevant as a structure. Here, some (mainly middle class and young) women or girls are posited as the ideal neoliberal subject because of their reflexivity, high levels of education, and ability to participate in the workforce while also reproducing and being key consumers (Holyoak, 2015). These are the 'can do' girls who are well placed to 'succeed' under neoliberalism, and who are constructed in contrast to 'at risk' girls who are less likely to succeed in this context, but who, because of the neoliberal discourse of responsabilisation, are blamed for their perceived failures (Harris, 2004). Thus, neoliberalism and post-feminism go hand in hand, with their emphasis on the autonomous woman or girl who makes individual choices without restriction and who excels within the current context.

However, this gendered 'ideal neoliberal subject' is limited to a small section of young, educated, and usually middle class girls, with most women's accessibility to equal opportunities under neoliberalism being restricted. Brown (2015) highlights the gendered contradictions of neoliberal logic. The neoliberal individual is portrayed as an independent, genderless individual who is expected to both care for and

invest in themselves. However, this depiction ignores the way in which the 'neoliberal figure is dependent on invisible practices and unnamed others' to be able to fulfil its economic role (Brown, 2015: 104). Overwhelmingly, this invisible infrastructure is constituted by the reproductive labour of women whose:

activities and bearing as *femina domestica* remain the unavowed glue for a world whose governing principle cannot hold it together, in which case women occupy their old place as unacknowledged props and supplements to masculinist liberal subjects (Brown, 2015: 104-5).

The neoliberal subject, then, is not as independent as it first appears; moreover, it is portrayed from a masculinist bourgeois viewpoint and 'nourished by [gendered] sources and qualities themselves not featured in the story' (Brown, 2015: 193). Therefore, gender subordination is both intensified and fundamentally altered in the neoliberal context where the work and cost of providing eliminated public services is returned disproportionately to women (Brown, 2015: 105).

Indeed, the Fawcett Society (2012) draws attention to how women are subject to the 'triple jeopardy' within the context of austerity, losing not only their services and jobs providing these services but being expected to fill the newly created service gap, unpaid. Such an expectation reflects traditional gendered notions of caring being women's work, and reinforces the traditional boundaries between the public and private spheres, where women are tied to the domestic, private sphere and men are associated with the public and political spheres. This contradicts the detraditionalisation thesis and in fact supports the 'retraditionalisation' thesis proposed by feminists in response to theories about the disappearance of gender structures. Here, traditional gender norms and roles are reinforced under neoliberalism, resulting in the restriction of women's opportunities to participate politically. Yet, problematically, we

have seen that neoliberalist discourses conceive of women as more free, autonomous and capable than ever before. Indeed, women, and young women in particular, are perceived to be 'the ideal neoliberal subject' (Gill and Scharff, 2011). Clearly, there are tensions here that need to be explored further within an empirical context, provoking exploration into the role of gender, gendered barriers to political participation, and the effects of neoliberalism on women's emotional lives.

Moreover, while the gender gap in political participation appears to be closing, individuals' experiences within movements demonstrate the continued influence of wider gender norms and roles (Dodson, 2015). Dodson (2015: 379) notes that 'aggregate gender ideology (widely shared attitudes about gender roles) discourages women from participating in confrontational activism'. He draws attention to how the division of labour within social movements is gendered with women often being assigned the mundane organisational tasks, which Thorne (1975: 181) termed 'shitwork'. Despite studying a distinctly male-oriented movement in a U.S context (the draft resistance) during the 1960s, Thorne's (1975) findings have been reinforced over the years (McAdam, 1992; Culley, 2003). McAdam (1992: 1226-7) notes that 'it was not simply that the female volunteers did different jobs than the males, but that the jobs typically assigned to them were seen as less important than those the men did'. In fact, Thorne (1975: 188) contends that 'even when they took the same actions, women and men often met with differential response'. Hence, men are more visible in social movements and given more prestige while women's contributions are not clearly or publicly recognised. Indeed, the environmental group that Cable (1992: 42) studies is known as emerging from a meeting between two men; what is less known is the fact that it was their wives who encouraged and initiated this meeting. It appears that there are deeply engrained gendered and sexist attitudes towards women participating in politics which result in women's contributions being undervalued or ignored.

Culley (2003: 452) reinforces this, identifying ways in which women's gender was used against them, including not being taken seriously by men in meetings, with participants referring to men as "very condescending". Such attitudes act as gendered barriers to activism, discouraging women from participating politically.

It becomes clear, then, that we need to study individuals' experiences within social movements, including the differences between experiences, and pay attention to the gendered dimension of these. McAdam (1992: 1212) observes that in the literature, activists are seen as distinguishable from non-activists (though within the context of anti-austerity activism we have seen that this may not be the case), and makes the point that activists are not an homogenous population. Therefore, we need to pay more attention to the differences between activists within the same movement. Drawing attention to gendered differences in experience, he (1992: 1214) highlights how:

Sociology often assumes a "single society" with respect to men and women, in which generalisations can be made about all participants, yet men and women may inhabit different social worlds, and these must be taken into account.

In fact, Einwohner et al (2000: 682) contend that 'social movements are gendered on all of these levels: individual, interactional, and structural'. In a similar manner, Acker (1990: 146) argues:

To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantages and disadvantages, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender.

Therefore, Kuumba (2001) proposes using a 'gender lens' to incorporate the structure of gender into all elements of analysis of social movements in order to make gendered differences and their implications more visible. Likewise, Taylor (1999) suggests the need to develop a systematic theory of gender and social movements that brings together existing feminist scholarship and social movement theory for several reasons. She (1999: 9) remarks that 'the role of gender stratification in the emergence of social movements, even those seemingly not about gender, has been obscured through the gender-neutral discourse that characterizes prevailing theories of social movements'. Like Einwohner et al (2000), Acker (1990), and Kuumba (2001), Taylor (1999) contends that gender hierarchy is created through organisational practices and that we should therefore expect gender and its intersections 'to be as much an organizing principle of protest groups as it is of institutionalized ones' (1999: 9). A gendered analysis of anti-austerity activism is especially important within the theoretical context of the supposed detraditionalisation of gendered roles and norms, and an empirical context where women are being disproportionately affected by austerity. Indeed, questions are raised about the extent to which we are actually witnessing a 'retraditionalisation' of gender, as discussed earlier.

While I have so far considered gendered barriers to political participation, Culley (2003: 447) contends that gender also facilitates in the case of mothers who are motivated to do activism out of concerns for their children, emphasising the central role of caring within women's activism; indeed, one participant in Culley's (2003: 454) study asserts that "women are nurturers [and] have the sense of caring", implying that women are possibly better activists because of this. This perspective harnesses feminist standpoint theory which contends that women have a distinctive perspective that is not only different to others but is also privileged (Tanesini, 1999: 138). This view draws on Hegelian ideas about different classes having different perspectives, with the proletariat having

a more accurate understanding of society because of its position. From a feminist standpoint, women's experiences differ structurally from men's because of the type of work that they do, with 'women's work' of reproduction being a 'labour of love' (Rose, 1983: 83-4). Moreover, women's dual marginal and central position in current social relations affords them a privileged viewpoint, as Tanesini (1999: 142) states: 'from their [women's] position, relations which are invisible from dominant positions become visible'. In fact, like Culley's (2003) participant, Rose (1983) suggests that women not only have different experiences but different cognitive ways of understanding and knowing the world, with women's caring labour again playing a crucial role here and endowing them 'with an affective way of knowing' (Tanesini, 1999: 143). Such views assume the existence of a female essence that is common among all women, leading to the criticism that this approach is essentialist and ignores differences between women in order to focus on differences between men and women. Further, it carries the risk of reinforcing traditional sex differences, along with the supposed biological basis of women's oppression. Clearly, this is problematic, and while I do not have space to explore this theory further here, it is something that I will return to in later chapters. For now, it is worth noting that a key merit of feminist standpoint theory is its emphasis on using women's lives as a starting point for developing theory, with lived experiences being central.

In fact, Culley (2003: 454) contends that the women she studied reconceptualised 'mother' as activism 'by expanding the definition to include action that ensures the well-being of an entire community and the authority of the mother as a political resource'. Similarly, Herda-Rapp (2000: 45) explores how activism became another expression of women's care work responsibilities for women involved in the toxic waste movement: 'their gender identities stretched to include activism on behalf of their children as part of their gender identity and part of their definition of motherhood and womanhood'. This provokes debate

about the relationship between private caring roles, gender, and activism, as well as about how we understand care more generally and how activism is defined and understood in relation to care.

Gender, care, and activism

Feminists have asserted the importance of care to both private and public life through their exploration of an ‘ethic of care’, which defines ‘care’ as ‘paid and unpaid labour across the politically decided boundaries of market, state, and family’ (Kremer, 2007: 29). This ‘ethic of care’ is rooted in a commitment to human inter-dependence which is contrasted to the dominant emphasis in citizenship on independence (which tends to be masculine) (Lister, 2008). Here, we are reminded of earlier discussions concerning the role of empathy and ethics in providing the motivation for political action. An ethic of care is a way of combining such feelings of empathy for the other and the moral duty to act, resulting in the practical act of providing care for others. Indeed, Sevenhuijsen (2000: 12) suggests the usefulness of a broad definition of care as a point of departure for ‘a political vision on the place of care in society’. She invokes Fisher and Tronto’s (1990: 40) definition of care as:

[A] species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

Himmelweit (2002: 52) contends that unpaid care is vital to public life and the economy, as well as ‘human individual socialization’. However, Kremer (2007: 38) points out that to focus on care alone is not enough; rather, we need to combine it with participation. For Kremer, this is a way to avoid the ‘Wollstonecraft dilemma’ that Lister (1997) identifies:

Should women become citizen workers, thereby achieving the corresponding rights and duties, or should the status of

citizen be upgraded so as to entitle women to full citizenship rights on the basis of caring? (Kremer, 2007: 35).

Crucially, we want to avoid trying to fit women into the masculine definition of citizenship and at the same time not maintain care as a woman's role only. Vital to achieving this is the degendering of care. Kremer (2007: 38) suggests that as care becomes valued on its own, it will be degendered, resulting in men and women being freer to make choices about whether they wish to be involved in caring work. Reflecting traditional gendered and sexist attitudes, Candas and Silier (2014: 118) assert that 'degendering care and making care a more collective responsibility are connected. So long as care is a woman's responsibility, it will remain devalued. And so long as it is a private responsibility, it will remain gendered'. In this vein, Fraser (1994) proposes the 'universal caregiver' model where men take on care and paid work, serving to degender care-giving and spread both private and public care work between men and women.

Such debates about the role of care within society and the importance of degendering care-giving are especially relevant within the context of austerity, given the 'triple jeopardy', that women face (Fawcett Society, 2012). As mentioned previously, women are disproportionately affected by austerity, losing public services, and their jobs providing these services, while being expected to pick up the resulting care work, unpaid. Such expectations rely on a traditional gendered notion of unpaid care work being a woman's role and thus it is important to break down this conception in order to avoid women shouldering the burden of public care work that is no longer funded by the state. Indeed, Himmelweit (2002: 57) warns that reducing public spending will have a gendered impact, especially if the cuts target parts of the public sector that provide caring services or the infrastructures that the unpaid care economy uses, as has been demonstrated by the Fawcett Society (2012) and the East London Fawcett Group (2013). Candas and Silier (2014: 104) contend that

‘most issues that were politicised in the previous era through struggles are getting re-privatised and turned into non-public troubles’. Here we see another implication of the austerity measures, namely, that previously ‘public concerns’ are being quietly subsumed, once again, into the private, and assumed to be women’s, domain.

Moreover, we have seen that gendered structural opportunity barriers exist which prevent women from participating politically and that these are usually connected to women’s private care roles. Therefore, degendering care would also contribute to removing such barriers by affording women the time to participate politically. However, we have also seen that when women do participate, their experiences differ from men’s and their contributions to social movements are less valued. There is a need, then, to explore the gendered experiences of and barriers to movement participation. Further, in line with developing an affective understanding of political engagement that explores the role of empathy in motivating activism and adopts a gender lens, we need to seriously consider the role of care within the context of anti-austerity activism. Anti-austerity activism provides a fertile and unique setting for such an investigation given that it constitutes a response to what Brown et al (2013) have called ‘a crisis of care’. Here, anti-austerity movements criticise the government’s lack of care for its citizens and seek to explore and demonstrate the possibility of alternative social relations based on care. Thus, activism is redefined and widened to signify care, a theme which this thesis will develop. However, broadening the definition of activism in this way problematises the role and identity of ‘activist’, which has traditionally been conceived of and portrayed as an extraordinary character. Within the context of populist discourses that contend that anti-austerity movements involve ‘ordinary people’ and the ‘99 percent’ – to what extent does an ‘activist’ identity exist? How is it defined, understood, and performed? And how do groups construct and negotiate their boundaries if everyone is to be included?

So far, I have outlined the key theoretical debates to which this thesis contributes, including that of old versus new social movements, the impact of new media technologies on contemporary movements, the role of gender in social movements, and the affective and cultural dimensions of social movements, paying close attention to the role of emotions in motivating and sustaining activism. I have argued for the development of a cultural and affective approach that utilises a gender lens to explore the making and practising of anti-austerity activist cultures within a specific local setting. Anti-austerity activism is a rich research setting that speaks to each of these debates in original ways; having situated the research project within its theoretical context, I now turn to outline the specifics of this particular research setting, situating it within its socioeconomic context.

Austerity

When the UK government's programme of austerity was announced in 2010 the official narrative was that, in the wake of the financial crisis, cuts to public spending were both necessary and inevitable. It was argued that the Coalition government were cleaning up the mess left by the previous Labour government, using the only method possible — austerity. Therefore, austerity was used to transform the crisis from a financial to a fiscal one. Clarke and Newman (2012: 300) describe the development of the austerity discourse:

It [austerity] has been reworked, at least in the UK, from an economic problem (how to 'rescue' the banks and restore market stability) to a political problem (how to allocate blame and responsibility for the crisis): a reworking that has focused on the unwieldy and expensive welfare state and public sector, rather than high risk strategies of banks, as the root cause of the crisis.

They draw our attention to a key feature of the government's austerity discourses, namely the allocation of blame and responsibility which is underlined by moral and political ideologies. O'Hara (2015: 8, 5) reinforces this, stating 'austerity was not an emergency response to testing economic times after all, but a permanent disassembling of the state [which was] paraded in the language of "fairness"'. One of the central underlying moral discourses is that of 'strivers versus skivers', a repackaging of the traditional 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor discourse. Here, those who work hard (producing capital) are conceived of as 'good' and deserving individuals who are pitted against the lazy, workshy, 'skivers' and 'benefit scroungers' who do not deserve any 'benefit' (Valentine and Harris, 2014). This narrative plays on what is deemed fair and moral within a society where rewards are expected to be preceded by hard work and, most crucially, where individuals are perceived to be responsible for their own situation. The consequence of this is that structural factors are erased and individuals are blamed for their predicaments with any failure being perceived to be a personal failing. It is therefore no longer the role of the state to support people who are to blame for the situation they find themselves in. This emphasis on responsibility is highlighted by Cameron (2009) in his 'Age of Austerity' speech where he asserts that 'the age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity'. Thus, austerity is seen as a solution to this moral deficit. As the New Economics Foundation (2013) states:

Well-framed, well-crafted and often repeated, the austerity story is the dominant political narrative in Britain today [...] [the government] have developed a clear plot, with heroes and villains, and use simple, emotional language to make their point clear.

The use of the word 'story' draws our attention to the fact that austerity is a narrative which has been constructed by those in power, and that it is not the only solution to the financial crisis, nor is it 'inevitable', as has

been portrayed to the British public. UK Uncut (2010) attempt to draw attention to this in their statement ‘austerity is an ideology, not a necessity’.

Both the responsabilisation discourse and the deliberate shrinking of the welfare state form part of the wider neoliberal project which has been underway since 1979 (Levitas, 2012). Here, the emphasis is on reducing the state and welfare, increasing privatisation and financialisation, and thus turning citizens into consumers of previously public services. Demonstrating this ideology, in 2013 Cameron spoke of forging a “leaner more efficient state [...] we need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently”. While this is not a new project, then, what *is* new is the way in which austerity is being used as a guise for ushering in such neoliberal changes. This is because the British public have largely accepted that austerity is necessary and that the deficit must be reduced; therefore, austerity acts as a Trojan horse that enables the rapid dismantling of the welfare state and the increasing privatisation and financialisation of society to occur with little resistance. As Levitas (2012: 322) states, austerity is ‘a neoliberal shock doctrine providing an excuse for further appropriation of social resources for the rich’. Reflecting the historical roots of this neoliberal project, Cameron draws on its ancestor, Thatcher, announcing resolutely in 2013 that “there is no alternative [to austerity]”. The constant repetition of this phrase is an attempt to instil it in the public imagination as truth, though its need to be constantly reasserted contradicts this (for if it really were the case, why would it need to be continually restated in order to be made true?). Moreover, this assertion reflects the government’s neglect of democratic processes, as ‘decisions on the implementation of austerity are thus made in a manner that precludes the possibility of meaningful discussion or consultation’ (White, 2016: 26), provoking discussion about the transformation of democracy.

In fact, Della Porta (2015) observes that anti-austerity politics is as much about reconfiguring democracy as it is about defending social protections of the past. Thus, anti-austerity protests ‘do not oppose just the economic crisis, but also the political crisis with which it is strictly intertwined’ (Della Porta, 2015: 119). Here, an already-existing crisis of political legitimacy has been deepened by the financial crisis and the resulting austerity measures. Della Porta (2015: 119) suggests that we are witnessing a particular version of this crisis of legitimacy in a post-democratic neoliberalism, which she calls a ‘crisis of responsibility’. This is formed by the combination of privatisation and deregulation which ‘strips off competences from the state and rights from the citizens’. In response, citizens’ mistrust of political institutions has increased, where ‘beyond the condemnation of corruption, the slogan “they don’t represent us” also expresses a deeper criticism of the degeneration of liberal democracy, linked in turn to elected politicians’ failure to “do politics”’ (Della Porta, 2015: 137). This context of crisis combined with the decline in traditional forms of left organisation opens up space for non-institutional social movements which seek to challenge not only austerity but the wider neoliberal system that underpins it (White, 2016). Therefore, social movements act as ‘agents of civil repair’ for a dialectical civil society whose independence makes its existence both possible and vulnerable at the same time (Alexander, 2006: 203). A central purpose of the civil sphere is to ‘invade’ and regulate other spheres (such as the political) as well as to demand reforms. However, just as the civil sphere can interrupt other spheres, it is vulnerable to destructive intrusions that threaten democratic social life. Given that the civil sphere is constantly being ruptured and intruded by such damaging forces, it is continually and dialectically involved in repairing itself. Such repairs can be made through ‘communication, regulation, restructuring and reform’, which is where social movements enter (Alexander, 2006: 205).

It becomes clear that anti-austerity politics is about more than merely preserving social protections of the past and influencing social policy. It is also about reconfiguring democracy, challenging neoliberalism and raising normative and moral questions about how society should function and how human beings should act (as we have seen in the previous section). In fact, Haiven and Khasnabish (2014: 3) contend that anti-austerity politics encapsulates the ‘radical imagination’ which imagines society in ways it might be, considering possible, positive, futures and finding a way to ‘bring these back’ to ‘work on the present, to inspire action and new forms of solidarity today’. In this sense, it involves a prefigurative political approach, acting in ways that constitute better alternatives to the current situation. The radical imagination builds upon this, however, to aid feelings of empathy for others and produces solidarity. Crucially, the radical imagination is ‘not a thing that individuals possess in greater or lesser quantities but [...] a collective process, something that groups do and do together’ (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014: 4). Here, the active and intersubjective dimensions of movements are emphasised, key notions which I will be returning to. Moreover, we are reminded of the importance of the affective dimension of austerity and its resistance.

Rather than perceiving the future in a positive manner, as suggested above, Coleman (2016: 100) contends that austerity creates pessimism about the future but that, crucially, this is a ‘hopeful pessimism’ which prompts ‘the creation of a politics of the present, focussing attention on how the day to day requires change’. Though Coleman’s (2016) participants [individuals facing austerity measures in their daily lives] imagine a bleak future, the focus on changing the everyday reflects the processes of prefigurative politics which seek to enact an alternative, better, future in the present. Anti-austerity movements’ focus on prefigurative politics is reminiscent of social movements such as the Women’s Liberation Movement which articulated the need for women-

only organisation that was 'locally-based, autonomous, non-hierarchical' and which enacted future ideals of challenging and resisting patriarchy within local contexts (Roseneil, 1995: 21). Another relevant pre-figurative movement is the Global Justice Movement (or Anti-Globalisation Movement) which aimed to combat corporate capitalism, utilising creative direct actions throughout the late 90s and 2000s. The roots of this movement can be traced back to the Mexican Zapatista movement which, again, fought against capitalism and for indigenous land rights, utilising creative and symbolic protests. The lasting influence of such movements is evident in the case of UK Uncut which has utilised creative direct action to draw attention to the public spending cuts and which has emphasised local autonomous organisation. Unfortunately, I do not have space to explore the history of these movements in depth and my focus is specifically on the British context, however, it is important to remember that anti-austerity activism does not take place within an historical and geographical vacuum but is situated within wider contexts. Indeed, British anti-austerity movements acknowledge that they form part of a wider global resistance to neoliberal capitalism, and austerity within this, but do not explicitly refer to the history of movements out of which they have emerged in order to position themselves as a new and distinct type of activism, which we will see in later chapters. Despite this, it is important to recognise that within an era of networks and information technologies, movements across the Western world are interconnected, harnessing similar discourses despite operating in different national contexts. Della Porta (2015) presents an accomplished study that paints the broad picture of European anti-austerity politics and *Notes from Nowhere* (2003) is a comprehensive overview of global anti-capitalism. In comparison, the purpose of this research is to present an in-depth, detailed analysis of a specific activist culture, rather than a broad overview. Nevertheless, it is vital to situate anti-austerity activism within the wider political and socioeconomic context out of which it emerged and to which it forms a response, a task I now turn to.

Situating anti-austerity movements within the wider context

In order to understand anti-austerity movements, we need to ‘look at the specific characteristics of the socio-economic, cultural and political context in which these protests developed’ (Della Porta, 2015: 3). Della Porta (2015) makes the case for bringing capitalism back into the analysis of social movements, focusing on the current form of ‘neoliberal capitalism’ which is ‘understood as a form of economic liberalism which emphasize[s] free trade, open market, and the role of the private sector versus the public one’ (Della Porta, 2015: 7). Indeed, a key feature of neoliberalism is ‘the privatization and (re)commodification of once-public goods, as social services are increasingly considered as a commodity to be sold on the market’ (Della Porta, 2015: 34). Alongside this, public spaces become privatised as a way of keeping away those who are considered to be ‘dangerous classes’ (Della Porta, 2015: 34). We start to see the underlying ideology of austerity which rather than being, as is claimed by the government, the logical and only way of reducing the national deficit, instead forms part of a wider neoliberal project to shrink the welfare state, and to increase privatisation of both services and spaces. Della Porta (2015: 69) remarks that ‘austerity means cuts in welfare, social services, salaries of social workers — but it also implies the spreading of an ideology, which deeply affects the very idea of social protection’. Likewise, Gilbert (2014: 43) notes that ‘the governing assumption of such “reforms” [to welfare provision] is that the production or mimicking of market relations within any sector of the economy — or indeed, any social situation whatsoever — will generate the best possible outcomes for “consumers”’. Indeed, Brown (2015) outlines how the latest phase of neoliberalism involves the ‘economization’ of every area of social life. In response, ‘protests and campaigns against welfare retrenchment have not just aimed at protecting the material conditions of users of social services and workers

in social services, but also contributed to elaborate a different conception of public service as common good, opposing its neoliberal conception as merchandise' (Della Porta, 2015: 140).

Furthermore, Della Porta (2015: 23) highlights neoliberal capitalism's 'immoral dimension, with cynical refusal of values of social protection and solidarity, to which movements responded through appeals to re-establish the social order they perceived to be broken'. Crucially, neoliberalism's 'challenge is not only material but also normative' (Della Porta, 2015: 68). Here, neoliberalism's emphasis on the market above the social reflects an immoral economy which anti-austerity activists react to 'in their defence of their dignity'. Commenting on the Arab Spring, Dabashi (2012: 127) claims:

Dignity is not a political matter. Dignity is a moral virtue that had now become a political force [...] a virtue sui generis. The innate humanism operative at the heart of an appeal to "dignity" in effects defines the revolutionary gathering of an inaugural moment for humanity at large.

Therefore, anti-austerity activists are motivated by moral and ethical values, 'bridging a moral framing with a political one' (Della Porta, 2015: 68). A key feature of this is a concern with how neoliberalism attacks conceptions of 'humanity'. Brown (2015: 43) demonstrates that:

Neoliberal rationality eliminates what these thinkers termed "the good life" (Aristotle) or "the true realm of freedom" (Marx), by which they did not mean luxury leisure, or indulgence, but rather the cultivation and expression of distinctly human capacities for ethical and political freedom, creativity, unbounded reflection, or invention.

Neoliberalism is therefore framed as inhumane, with activists drawing on widespread notions of humanity in resisting austerity. Indeed, when

stating their reasons for protesting, a YouTube video promoting the 15 May 2011 demonstration in Spain states 'Because we are more humane. Because we are more decent. Because we are more respectable. Because we are more' (Geraudo, 2012: 67). Thus, anti-austerity activism reacts to neoliberalism's transforming of humans into 'human capitals [...] [who] do not have the standing of Kantian individuals, ends in themselves, intrinsically valuable' but are conceived of solely in terms of economic value (Brown, 2015: 38).

Therefore, while anti-austerity activism is concerned with material factors and class relations, it is also concerned with wider normative questions and a demand for recognition. In this respect, such activism reinforces Fraser's (1995: 69) claim that 'justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition'. As discussed earlier in terms of gender and NSMT, Fraser seeks to reconcile the supposed divide between materialist (or old) and post-materialist (or new) social movements, with 'redistribution' being about material concerns of wealth and 'recognition' tending to be associated with identity politics and the call to recognise and respect difference. Questions are raised, then, about the role of morals and the normative within anti-austerity activism, as well as the ways in which universal discourses of humanism are utilised to ground resistance to such perceived attacks on humanity, and how these work alongside particularist concerns about difference.

Responses to austerity that emphasise humanity and the 'common good' reflect a concern with the collective in the face of an increasingly individualised society. Neoliberalism places focus on the competitive individual with citizens being conceived of as entrepreneurs of themselves and their lives. In the vein of Foucault, neoliberalism is thus a mentality of government, where individuals are expected to work on and regulate the 'self' in order to 'better themselves' and to be successful (usually defined in monetary terms). Within this context, emphasis is placed on the 'autonomous choices' of 'rational, calculating and self-

regulating' individuals, where 'the neoliberal subject is required to bear full responsibility for their life biography no matter how severe the constraints upon their action' (Gill, 2008: 436). Such an approach removes the social and the structural and ignores the relational aspects of identity construction, instead conceiving of the individual as an isolated and entirely autonomous agent. Neoliberalism has therefore shifted from being a political and economic approach to being a mode of governmentality that permeates many social spheres (Gill, 2008). Indeed, Brown (2015: 71) asserts that there is a shift from the neoliberal discourse of 'free subjects to a discourse featuring more explicitly governed, "responsibilized", and managed subjects'. Significantly, though subjects are responsible for both themselves and the economy, they are given no guarantee of security or protection. Reflecting this, Bauman (2000) refers to the current context as 'liquid modernity', emphasising its insecurity and perpetual uncertainty. Here, collective identities become difficult to develop and 'individualism wins over the collectivity' (Della Porta, 2015: 74), which poses problems for the formation and sustenance of collective identities. Furthermore, as I outlined earlier, neoliberalism and its effects are gendered, returning us to the central issue of the need to consider the role of gender when exploring how individuals resist such pervasive forces through social movement activity.

This chapter has identified the key theoretical debates to which this thesis contributes, including that of new versus old social movements, the influence of new media technologies on contemporary movements, the need to consider emotions in social movement studies, and the need for an exploration of the gendered experiences of social movement participation. I have drawn on feminist literature to demonstrate the importance of considering the role of gender when exploring social movements and used this to highlight the absence of gender in mainstream social movement theory. These debates have been grounded in the current political and socioeconomic context of neoliberal

capitalism, which I have outlined alongside the specific context of austerity in the UK. Overall, I have argued for the development of a cultural and affective approach that utilises a gender lens to explore the making and practising of anti-austerity activist cultures within a specific local setting, thus contributing to a feminist theory of social movements. The following chapters will demonstrate such an approach, build on the existing theoretical debates, and introduce new areas of literature as they arise in relation to the research.

Chapter 3: Researching Anti-Austerity Activist Cultures: A Methodological Approach

A researcher's choice of methods is influenced by the ontological and epistemological assumptions that they make (Potter, 2006). Ontology concerns the nature of what exists and how this can be known whilst epistemology concerns what constitutes knowledge and how it can be discovered or created (Benton and Craib, 2010). As Potter (2006: 76) asserts 'whatever you do, you need to start with a close scrutiny of the logic of your planned inquiry, and the ideological and philosophical assumptions upon which this logic is based'. This chapter will provide a critical and reflexive account of the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the research, focusing on a feminist approach to research and symbolic interactionism. I then provide an overview of the broad research aims and questions that informed the research and detail the methods used and why these were the most appropriate for this research. Following this, I outline the sampling method used and how access was gained to the research field, culminating in participant profiles which outline the participants' demographics. Finally, I explain how data analysis was undertaken and explore questions of research ethics. Having provided a critical exploration of the research methodology, chapter 4 will explore the local context in depth, drawing on participants' narratives to provide background information for the groups studied.

Epistemological and methodological foundations

A feminist approach

While it is acknowledged that no single feminist epistemology or methodology exists, it is argued that the combination of certain features demarcates 'feminist research practice' (Hesse-Biber, 2007). These include an understanding that gender inequality exists, a commitment to

political change through research, a concern with the subjective, lived experiences of participants, an emphasis on knowledge building as a relational process which requires researcher reflexivity, and an acknowledgement of the positionality of the researcher and the power dynamics between researcher and the researched, which influence the knowledge produced.

Historically, sciences and the social sciences have subscribed to positivism that emphasises objectivity, generalisability, universality of knowledge, and value-neutrality (Benton and Craib, 2010). This scientific method emerged from Enlightenment thinking and carried with it the associated dualisms of male/female, rational/irrational, and objective/subjective, where the latter in these binaries is perceived to be inferior and the former is afforded legitimacy. Therefore, male objective rational knowledge is privileged over female irrational and subjective experience (Benton and Craib, 2010). The starting point for a feminist approach to research is to challenge the androcentric foundations of the positivist scientific method, drawing attention to how it 'produces biased research and supports an objective, hierarchical approach to knowledge building' (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007: 143) which neglects other, suppressed forms of knowledge. Feminists have sought to move women's voices and experiences from the margins to the centre of research, ascribing them the status of legitimate knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 3).

A feminist approach focuses on lived experiences, feelings, and the subjective, conceiving of 'people as active, knowing subjects rather than passive objects of study' (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007: 147). Notably, 'subject' is used here to emphasise the subjectivity of individuals who participate in research, rather than to label them as a research 'subject' who is 'subject' to the researcher's requirements (as has traditionally been the view within positivist studies). In order to move away from these connotations, I use the term 'participants' to refer to those who took part in the research, emphasising their subjectivity and active

participation in constructing knowledge. While this may place too much emphasis on the researched and thus seemingly mask the power imbalance that will inevitably exist between researcher/researched, given that I acknowledge and will explore this imbalance, combined with the positive connotations of participant, I believe that this is the most appropriate term to use.

Because I draw on a feminist approach to research, participants' lived experiences have been central throughout, from formulating research questions to reporting on findings. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007: 147, 148) contend that within feminist research, 'tapping into lived experiences is key' and that 'without empathic, interpersonal relationships, researchers will be unable to gain insight into the meaning people give to their lives'. Therefore, rather than attempting to fulfil a researcher position which is detached from the social world that it studies, and which seeks to excavate pre-existing facts, it is recognised that knowledge is relational, produced intersubjectively, and that the researcher's relationship with participants influences the subsequent knowledge produced. Oakley (1981: 49) reinforces this:

A feminist methodology [...] requires [...] that the mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.

It is therefore important to foster good relationships with participants, something which I achieved through participating in events and meetings for 2 and a half years. Holyoak (2015) asserts that it is important to develop trusting relationships when researching activism because of the 'security culture' that exists, with activists being wary of 'outsiders'.

This is especially the case in Nottingham given the high profile case of Mark Kennedy, which broke in 2011, of an undercover policeman who infiltrated Nottingham environmental movements for years, even having a relationship with one of the activists involved. Therefore, understandably, individuals are wary of newcomers with this betrayal of trust still at the forefront of their memories, particularly as some of my participants knew Mark. However, while developing good relationships and trust with participants is crucial, there are ethical dilemmas present. Such relationships may help to break down some of the power imbalances between researcher and researched but they can also mask and heighten others. It is important to remember, as Stacey (1991) asserts, that the researcher always maintains power over their participants as it is the researcher who decides what is recorded and what is not, as well as how things are interpreted and presented. Therefore, to assume the complete removal of this hierarchy (as Oakley, 1981 does) is not only naïve but dangerous as it misleads participants. Given the emphasis which feminist research places on being non-exploitative and doing no harm, this is obviously problematic. In fact, Oakley (2015) recognises this and adapts her position to instead describe the research process in terms of 'the gift' which participants give to researchers – their time, stories, and understanding, with the implication being that the act of giving is not conditional upon what the receiver chooses to do with the gift. Therefore, the product of research is 'our story of their story' (Oakley, 2015: 14).

It becomes clear that unlike positivist objective research, a feminist approach actively acknowledges and reflects on the power imbalances that exist between researcher and researched. A key part of this is recognising the researcher's 'positionality' and how this influences the research process from topic selection through to data analysis and presentation. Feminist research practice therefore directly challenges the positivist assertion that research should be 'value-neutral' and objective.

As Mills (1959: 204) states '[t]he social scientist is not some autonomous being standing outside society. No-one is outside society, the question is where he [*sic*] stands within it'. There is no objective 'view-from-nowhere'. In fact, Hawkesworth (2007: 478) asserts that the traditional focus on objectivity as a need to control one's inner self in order to accurately research an external reality, 'masks the social constitution of subjectivity' and misunderstands subjectivity 'as an obscuring "enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture if it be not delivered and reduced"' (Bacon, 1861: 276, cited in Hawkesworth, 2007: 478). Instead, it is argued that rather than ignoring the researcher's positionality in a vain attempt to achieve objectivity, by reflexively paying attention to this, we can produce better and more rigorous research. This involves both recognising the researcher's position as well as the ways in which we impact on our research sites and how this influences the knowledge which we produce. Indeed, Letherby (2003: 6) notes that the 'research field' metaphor is useful in thinking about the fact that 'when we enter a field we make footprints on the land and are likely to disturb the environment. When we leave we may have mud on our shoes, pollen on our clothes'. Therefore, the research process impacts not only on those who are researched but also the researcher.

This two-way impact on researcher and researched was demonstrated during my research in several ways. While I had an interest in anti-austerity activism, I had not previously been very active in the local scene (partly due to time pressures and partly due to other reasons), and having to participate for research purposes enabled me to become more politically active. After the research ended I continued to be involved in local activism and to build friendships with many of my participants, some of whom are now good friends of mine. I have also been more involved in administrating Facebook groups and organising events with other activists and have spoken openly about my research to help strengthen groups. While a positivist approach would consider this bias

that negatively affects the research, I contend that, following a feminist approach, such experiences enable me to gain a fuller understanding of local activist cultures through sharing activist experiences and being immersed in the research setting. The key is to remain critical and to acknowledge my position, as encouraged by such an approach.

From my participants' perspective, it was clear that participating in the research had an impact on them. Several key local activists found the interview process therapeutic and emotional – as evidenced by Leonie who at the end of a 90-minute interview was visibly emotional, stating “I feel all emotional now” and speaking about how good it was to remember. Following this interview and others, participants started to speak to each other about their interview experience and the thoughts and memories that it brought up, which resulted in them deciding to become active again, organising a march which was better attended than any local event in recent years. It would be arrogant and unrealistic to claim that I was the cause of such organising, something I am keen to avoid doing, however, it is clear that participating in the research encouraged individuals to speak to each other about activism and to start making steps to reinvigorate local activities. The interview space can often be a ‘welcome space for reflection’ (Maddison, 2007: 404), which encourages individuals to reflect upon their experiences more than they otherwise would have done (Oakley, 1981: 48). Such reflection has enabled individuals to discuss problems that occurred during Notts Uncut (which had not previously been addressed as a group), to recognise that many of them experienced the same problems and feelings, and to work on finding solutions for these.

Having outlined the need for researchers to be self-reflexive and acknowledge their positionality, I will now briefly provide some details about myself before detailing the epistemological underpinnings of the research. I began this chapter by exploring a feminist approach to research which is threaded throughout my epistemological and

methodological choices, as will be apparent, and forms the foundations of the research. I am a white woman in my late 20s who is highly educated. Like my participants, I find class to be a difficult category to define and identify with. My parents are both from working class backgrounds but would consider themselves to be middle class, I am highly educated but in a precarious position in terms of employment. At the time of writing, I worked part time at a bookshop alongside sessional teaching combined with other small part time jobs in order to support myself. I therefore relate to participants' ambiguous relationship with class, however, because I have a fairly nondescript accent and am in academia, I may be read by participants as being middle class which could create a boundary between myself and participants who strongly identify as working class. Getting to know my participants over time prevented (or broke down) such boundaries that might have been formed on first impressions. Despite this, I remain aware of the privilege that I have as a white highly educated person.

I am a feminist, which to me means believing in and campaigning for gender equality in all areas of life, drawing attention to and campaigning against sexism, and supporting women's issues. Therefore, I start from the position that we live in an unequal, patriarchal society which oppresses and disadvantages those who are considered to be women. This gives me the motivation and understanding to research gendered experiences utilising a feminist approach, demonstrating how researchers' politics impact on their methodological choices. Further, I subscribe to an intersectional feminism which acknowledges the need to consider how different oppressions and experiences such as race, class, disability, and sexuality, interact with gender to produce different experiences of oppression. Therefore, I have tried to consider in this case how class and gender intersect to produce various experiences and am aware of the absences of other intersections, due to the practical constraints of conducting a project such as this. I am politically left-wing

and am not a member of any political party. I therefore chose to research anti-austerity activism as I am sympathetic to the movement's cause but wanted to critically explore the cultural and affective dimensions of political engagement, applying a feminist approach.

While I can only assume how my participants viewed me, from our interactions there seemed to be varying perceptions of my identity. I entered the field as a researcher and thus this is how participants were first introduced to me. Though I became friends with many participants over time, they were still aware of my researcher role, which would surface in the form of jokes about whether I was “analysing” conversations for my research. Further, because of my position as researcher, some participants considered me to be an ‘expert’, seeking advice and reassurance from me about the level and type of activism they do (as will be demonstrated in later chapters). Though I was mostly positively received, and considered to be an activist by many participants who spoke of ‘us’ activists and included me within this, there were some individuals who were more hostile to my position, suggesting that I was not a ‘real’ activist. I therefore experienced some of the judgements which participants spoke about, first-hand, enabling me to develop a better understanding of their impact. As Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007: 498, 499) assert, ‘not only do we researchers attempt to define our role; how others see us is also in flux [...] researchers can only come to understand themselves as subject/object, insider/outsider by reflexively examining the continuously shifting nature of one’s role in the field’. Therefore, ‘[r]esearchers are never fully insiders or outsiders’.

So far, I have identified that the research is informed by feminist research practice and detailed what this means, focusing on the importance of subjective lived experiences, the power imbalances between researcher and researched, and the need to consider the researcher’s positionality. Part of a feminist approach to research is the epistemological belief that knowledge is produced relationally and

situated within particular contexts. Given this and the focus on lived experiences, I contend that there is an obvious fit between a feminist approach to research and symbolic interactionism, which is the underlying epistemology of this research. I now turn to elucidate this approach before detailing the methods that I used.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, as outlined by Blumer (1969), views knowledge as being constructed through social interaction and interpreted by social actors. Symbolic interactionism has three main premises: human beings act towards objects according to the meaning the things have to them; the meaning that these objects have is derived from social interaction with others and; 'these things are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process' (Blumer, 1969: 2). Meanings are therefore central 'in their own right' (Blumer, 1969: 3). Indeed, another effect and criticism of positivism's dominance within sociology has been the neglect of meaning (Alexander, 2003). The emphasis placed by positivism on using an objective, value-free method to excavate pre-existing facts and to deduce theory by hypothesis testing (Potter, 2006; Blumer, 1969) does not allow for the 'development of first-hand acquaintance with the sphere of life under study', often resulting in a detachment of the researcher from the social area that they study (Blumer, 1969: 37). This is summed up by the notion of the researcher sitting in their 'ivory tower', separated from their research 'subject'. Instead, it is argued that researchers should move 'off-the-veranda' and into the communities which they propose to study (Davies, 2008; Fetterman, 1998). Whilst it is acknowledged that different research approaches are appropriate to meet different aims, it is argued that in order to produce an in-depth study focussed on the lived experiences of participants, the researcher needs to gain first-hand experience of that area of social life. As Bryman (1988: 52) argues, 'attempts to understand social reality must be grounded in people's experience of that social reality'. In fact, Blumer (1969: 39) asserts that

the researcher's task is to 'lift the veils' that obscure what is happening in an area of social life and that the best way to do this is 'by getting close to the area and by digging deep into it through careful study'.

Given that the social world is made up of interactions and interpretations it is crucial to 'get inside of the defining process of the actor in order to understand his action' (Blumer, 1969: 16). However, it is unrealistic and potentially arrogant, to assume that the researcher has the ability to 'step into the shoes' of their participants and achieve an identical worldview which they can then critique. We have seen that researchers are influenced by their values, attitudes, and social position and that it is not possible to discard these. It is possible, though, to place participants' perspectives at the centre of the research by utilising methods that enable this.

However, similarly to feminist methodologies, symbolic interactionism has been criticised for being too subjective and thus lacking research credibility (Benton and Craib, 2010). This criticism reflects the traditional Enlightenment ideas that place subjective (usually female) experience below objective male knowledge – a perspective that feminist research practice seeks to challenge. Whilst positivist researchers may claim to be value-free, all human beings form preconceptions about the social world, including areas that they are not familiar with. Rather than attempt the impossible task of eliminating these images and values, the researcher must strive to be aware of and to challenge them (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Indeed, the research should be guided by 'a conscientious and continuous effort to test and revise one's images' (Blumer, 1969: 37). Therefore, subjective approaches can produce more rigorous and thus credible research by critically interrogating the position from which knowledge is produced.

Moreover, the process of getting close to an area of social life and digging deeply is:

[n]ot a simple matter of just approaching a given area and looking at it. It is a tough job requiring a high order of careful and honest probing, creative yet disciplined imagination, resourcefulness and flexibility in study, pondering over what one is finding, and a constant readiness to test and recast one's view and images of the area (Blumer, 1969: 40).

It is important, then, for the researcher to enter the field with as open a mind as possible (bearing in mind the social 'baggage' we all bring to the research setting) and to remain critical throughout the research process. Therefore, this approach, whilst not objective, is rigorous and involves two fundamental elements: exploration and inspection (Blumer, 1969). The first of these involves the researcher becoming acquainted with the area that they propose to study. Exploration is a way for the researcher to develop and sharpen their inquiry so that their interpretations arise out of and are grounded in the empirical world (Blumer, 1969: 40). Symbolic interactionism acknowledges the existence of an empirical world which 'exists as something available for observation, study and analysis' (Blumer, 1969: 21). The key point is that access can only be gained to this world through people's interactions with and interpretations of it. Unlike social constructionism, symbolic interactionism argues that the external existence of reality can be known through the ways it can 'talk back' to the pictures that we build of it (Blumer, 1969: 22). Reality can challenge, bend, and resist our conceptions of its character.

The research utilised an exploratory approach, beginning with a broad focus that sharpened as the research developed. This sharpening was achieved by analysing data alongside exploration in the field, which is:

A flexible procedure in which the scholar shifts from one to another line of inquiry, adopts new points of observation as his study progresses, moves in new directions previously unthought of, and changes his recognition of what are

relevant data as he acquires more information and better understanding (Blumer, 1969: 40).

Blumer (1969: 44) calls this 'sharpening' process 'inspection' where the area of study is submitted to scrutiny. Here the researcher approaches the data from different angles, asking questions and remaining critical despite their participation in the area of social life being studied. In all, this approach constitutes what Blumer (1969: 47) terms 'naturalistic inquiry' and is hopefully a method that can release social scientists from 'unwitting captivity to a format of inquiry that is taken for granted as the naturally proper way in which to conduct scientific study'.

Research aims and questions

The overall aim of the research was to produce an in-depth understanding, or 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), of local anti-austerity activist cultures and individuals' experiences and meanings of anti-austerity activism. This involved exploring the 'making' and 'practising' of activist cultures within a specific context, paying close attention to the affective dimension of political engagement. The research started with a general interest in the cultural and affective dimensions of political engagement at the local level. As Maddison (2007: 392) asserts:

The cultural lens brings into focus a far wider range of social movement activity, including those activities that take place quietly, 'behind the scenes', and yet without which no publicly visible movement could be possible. Such focus, on what Melucci (1985) calls 'submerged networks' (p.800), constitutes social movement actors as 'diffuse and decentralized' (Taylor, 2000: 222) and takes account of periods away from the public spotlight.

Therefore, such research reveals insights which are likely to be missed and which are vital to movement life. Moreover, Taylor (1998) argues that using gender as an analytical lens aids the development of a social

movement theory which explores the ‘cultural, emotional and subjective aspects of contention and activism that rationalist or cognitive approaches have not acknowledged’ (Holyoak, 2015: 40). Focusing on gender within social movements allows us to not only better explore the cultural and affective dimensions of political engagement, but to contribute to both social movement and feminist theory in original ways.

The broad research questions which emerged during the research process include the following:

- 1) What motivates and sustains anti-austerity activism?
- 2) How is the ‘activist’ identity constructed, negotiated, and performed (or resisted) by participants?
 - a. In what ways is the activist identity gendered?
- 3) What barriers exist that prevent individuals from participating politically and how can these be overcome?
 - a. To what extent are these barriers gendered?
- 4) How do online and offline political spaces and forms of activism interact?

Research methods and approach

A gender lens

Acker (1990: 146) argues that ‘gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender’. Crucially, gender is threaded throughout experiences of social movements and is not an ‘add-on’ to research but an approach in itself. Therefore, drawing on Kuumba (2001), I utilised a ‘gender lens’ which incorporates the structure of gender into all elements of social movement analysis, thus making gendered differences and their implications more visible. This approach was deemed especially appropriate given the disproportionate impact of austerity on women and the resulting ‘triple jeopardy’ women face (Fawcett Society, 2012).

Qualitative research methods

I used a combination of qualitative research methods including participant observation and semi-structured interviews, as these were the most appropriate to fulfil the research aims of developing an in-depth understanding and ‘thick description’ of participants’ experiences and meanings of anti-austerity activism. Indeed, Marshall and Rossman (2011: 5) assert that qualitative research has the potential to provide ‘quality, depth, and richness in the findings’. In line with the epistemological underpinnings of the research, qualitative research’s attention to the complexity of social interactions and the ‘meanings that participants themselves attribute to these interactions’ provides the opportunity to explore participants’ experiences and meanings. Maddison (2007: 397) reinforces this, suggesting that qualitative methods “capture meaning, process and context” and are most appropriately used in research where the aim is to “explore people’s subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences” (Devine, 1995, cited in Maddison, 2007: 397). What’s more, Maddison (2007: 397) contends that ‘qualitative research allows for an understanding of how experience, feelings, meaning, and process in turn influence the *actions* of research participants’, which aids an understanding of the connection between emotion and action. Qualitative methods are therefore participant-focused and grounded in lived experiences, subsequently making them the most suitable methods to use when exploring the cultural and affective dimensions of political engagement. Finally, qualitative methods allow for flexibility within the research design, suiting an exploratory approach, with the possibility for the study to change direction according to insights that occur within the field. As Marshall and Rossman (2011: 2) state, qualitative research is ‘emergent and evolving’.

Interviews

The research used semi-structured, open-ended interviews to produce in-depth data about participants' experiences and meanings of political activism. This method was chosen because of its ability to 'provide greater breadth and depth of information [and] the opportunity to discover the respondent's experiences and interpretations of reality' (Maddison, 2007: 399). In line with feminist methodology, it is acknowledged that rather than naturally occurring, the interview is a constructed occasion, and that whilst it occurs between two actors, these actors are not equal partners as it is the researcher who 'defines and controls the situation' (Riessman, 1993: 6). Oakley (2015: 3) acknowledges that despite attempts to minimise the power imbalances between researcher and researched, information tends to pass one way — from interviewee to interviewer. The conversation is guided by the researcher who has a list of topics they wish to elicit information from their participants about. I had a rough interview guide with several topics and questions that I intended to ask participants, including 'how did you first get involved in anti-austerity activism?' and 'What does "activist" mean to you?'

While I allowed the interview to be led by the participant in order for topics to emerge which I had not previously considered, I quickly discovered that beginning the interview with too open an approach could be daunting for participants who would often not know what to say. I therefore started the interviews with some general questions and then let the conversation develop more naturally once the participant had relaxed into the situation. The interview guide therefore acted as a prompt only as I was keen to follow the participant's lead, engaging in what DeVault and Gross (2007: 182) have called 'active listening', which required my full attention. Active listening (DeVault and Gross, 2007: 182):

[M]eans more than just physically hearing or reading; rather, it is a fully engaged practice that involves not only taking in information via speech, written words, or signs, but also actively processing it – allowing that information to affect you, baffle you, haunt you, make you uncomfortable, and take you on unexpected detours, “away from abstract [...] bloodless professionalized questions,” toward peoples, knowledges, and experiences that have been disavowed, overlooked and forgotten (Gordon, 1997: 40).

Therefore, my interview guide was altered over the course of the research as areas of interest emerged from early interviews and participant observation. Gender emerged early on as a central theme after I had conducted the initial few interviews and so I decided to focus more clearly on this within later interviews and added questions about feminism to the interview guide. A minimalist structure allowed such freedom, giving the participant the space and time to speak openly about topics. I made sure to finish the interview by asking if there was anything else the participant wanted to speak about so that I did not miss anything that they deemed significant.

Despite this, the fact that the interview situation is a constructed setting remained evident, demonstrated by the way several participants made comments about how they should have “done research” or “extra reading” before the interview in order to be knowledgeable enough (in their eyes) for the occasion (regardless of how often I stressed that it was just a conversation about their experiences). While many participants eased into the interview after realising that it was not as formal or intimidating as they had anticipated, there was still the sense that once the Dictaphone was switched off, participants relaxed. Conversations were often continued long after recording had stopped because participants felt more comfortable and wanted to continue chatting. Participants were also eager to know what others had said, and whether

their views matched those of their peers, perhaps to see whether they had 'towed the line' in terms of group narrative, but also out of a human curiosity. Obviously, due to confidentiality I was unable to reveal information about other participants (though they often discussed the interviews among themselves). Amusingly, several male participants demonstrated performance anxiety, asking whether their interview was longer than other males that they knew had participated. Moreover, there were some advantages to the interview being a constructed occasion with participants feeling more able to speak openly with someone in this setting than had it been an informal conversation between friends. Indeed, Adrian remarked that though he only agreed to speak to me because of our mutual friends (meaning he could trust me), he found it easier to talk with strangers than people he was close to.

The interview situation produces narratives through which participants attempt to make sense of their experiences (Riessman, 1993). It is important to recognise that these narratives are fluid and constantly reshaped by participants during the telling. Indeed, Kvale (1996: 31) argues that 'the process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness', which was demonstrated by several participants who stated that they had not realised certain things before discussing them during the interview. Furthermore, narratives do not 'speak for themselves', and thus they need to be interpreted (Riessman, 1993: 22). Therefore, the researcher needs to 'read between the lines' during and after the interview (Kvale, 1996; Mason, 2002). In order to avoid misrepresenting participants' views, I 'checked' my interpretations with participants during the interview by 'sending back' the implicit meanings within their narratives to see if they confirmed or disagreed with my interpretations (Kvale, 1996: 31). This has to be done carefully in order to not lead the participant in certain directions; I carefully considered the wording of my questions to avoid bias.

The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone, with written informed consent being gained prior to the interview and the participant being given the opportunity to ask questions. I transcribed each recording soon after the interview took place and used this as part of the analysis process, noting key themes and interesting quotations, which helped me to begin making connections across the data (Mason, 2002). Themes were allowed to emerge organically from the data and added to a codebook of themes and sub-themes which were grouped together into a logical structure (Mason, 2002). A new narrative is thus created by the researcher from the data. In order to combat the criticism that the researcher may be imposing their own themes upon the data, or that their interpretation is incorrect, I have provided extended quotations from the interviews throughout analysis. This means that the participant's voice is given a prominent place in the research write-up and the reader can judge my interpretations, as well as make their own. The practicalities of analysing and reporting data means that decisions are made about what to exclude as well as what to include. I decided early on to prioritise the voices of my participants, in line with a feminist approach, in order to centre the research on the lived and felt experiences of participants and to make sure that this was prominent. The following analysis therefore is focussed on the rich data provided by the interviews. Participant observation and text analysis were used to guide the topics that I explored using the interviews and also aided me to build trust with participants through my participation in the local activist scene.

All data was anonymised, affording participants full confidentiality and the safety and freedom to speak openly, with pseudonyms being used in the write-up. This process of anonymisation is especially important in the context of activism with some individuals having concerns about the security of their jobs and others revealing personal information that they did not wish to be attributed to them. A central priority of this research

is protecting the participants who have kindly given their time and trust to myself as the researcher. In order to preserve anonymity, I have decided to attribute quotations to pseudonyms and offer minimal information about participants' characteristics so that there is no danger of individuals being identified and losing the anonymity which was promised to participants at the outset of the research as a condition of their participation.

Participant observation

I participated in local anti-austerity activism from 2011 until 2013, attending groups' organising meetings, events, and protests, including those by Notts Uncut, the People's Assembly, Trade Unions, Nottingham Women for Change, and other isolated campaigns against public spending cuts. My extended immersion within the setting enabled me to gain trust among participants and subsequent access to interview participants. I entered the field with an open strategy, attending events and protests 'with broad areas of interest but without predetermined categories or strict observational checklists' (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 139). This enabled the research to be led by topics which emerged in the field and prevented any data being excluded (Fetterman, 1998). The longer I participated, the more refined my questions and observations became as I learnt how and what to ask (Brewer, 2000), which influenced the topics raised in the interviews. I recorded field-notes using 'jottings' (on-the-spot field-notes) where appropriate which were then expanded upon once I was home. This was done in order to limit mistakes made due to relying on memory, which is fallible, and to ensure that observations were as accurate as possible (Mason, 2002). However, this was not always possible as there are occasions where it is inappropriate to write notes (such as at protests) and the presence of a researcher making notes can serve to distance the researcher from the group or impact upon the participants' behaviour as they are aware of being observed (Bryman, 2008).

I considered the roles of participant and observer as being on a spectrum, rather than divided into two categories. As Marshall and Rossman (2011: 140) state, 'the researcher is both a participant (to varying degrees) and an observer (also to varying degrees)'. Emphasis is placed on the researcher's fluid movement between roles and the need to be critical about their experiences as both participant and observer. However, the process of participating within an organisation requires ethical considerations to be made, particularly about the impact on participants. I especially wished to avoid what has been termed 'parachute research' with the researcher 'dropping in to collect data without engaging with the community, and then leaving without sharing the data and results' (Costello and Zumla, 2000 cited in Cordner et al, 2012: 166-176). Instead, Marshall and Rossman (2011: 141) argue that 'ethical practice would suggest that these relationships be benign, non-manipulative, and mutually beneficial'. As I have outlined previously in relation to invoking a feminist approach, I intend to feed back the findings of the research to participants in order to help strengthen their movements.

Sampling and access

Unlike the positivist tradition which prioritises large random samples, qualitative research typically uses a smaller, selective sample in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular area of social life (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Participant recruitment was ongoing throughout my time in the field, utilising a snowball sampling approach where contact with initial participants was used to establish contact with subsequent participants (Bryman, 2008). My immersion within the research field for 2 and a half years, attending local organisation meetings, events, and protests, enabled trust to be built between myself and potential participants which allowed access to be gained. Having established a good relationship with initial research participants helped to recruit additional participants who often took part in the research

because they were friends with another participant and trusted their judgement. Adrian demonstrates this as he was very nervous and paranoid about speaking about his activism, but said that he had agreed to do so because a good friend of his, Alex (another participant) had told him I was “alright” and could be trusted. It was obvious that Adrian felt uncomfortable when the interview began as he was very aware of the Dictaphone and giving short, closed answers to questions. Rather than proceed, I addressed the fact that interviews can be a stressful environment due to their artificial nature and reassured Adrian that it did not need or intend to be formal and that it was simply a conversation about his experiences between two friends of Alex. Following this, he visibly relaxed and started to speak more openly and freely.

I interviewed 30 local activists using semi-structured interviews that lasted on average for 90 minutes, to gain an in-depth understanding of participants’ perspectives. The criteria for being interviewed was merely that the individual self-defined as having been involved in some capacity in local anti-austerity activism. This meant that I had a mix of those who were core players in movements as well as those who were on the periphery of groups, enabling a wide range of narratives. Furthermore, while I originally asked for ‘activists’ to participate, I quickly discovered that the term had ambiguous and complex meanings for individuals. I therefore dropped the word ‘activist’ from any online posts or emails requesting participation. In fact, the construction of the ‘activist’ identity became a central theme of the research which emerged from these initial experiences and conversations with individuals involved in local activism. As with the interview topics, then, my research topic shifted and developed from my time within the field as well as from the feedback I received early on in the research process. While I began the search for participants by using Facebook and websites of local anti-austerity groups, the most successful method of participant recruitment was snowball sampling, as participants spread the word that I could be

trusted and encouraged others to come forwards. I am very grateful for the support I received from earlier participants in recruiting later participants, especially at times when recruitment slowed down. I felt that the data saturation point had been reached by the 30th interview as the same themes were recurring.

Participant demographics

The sample included 17 males and 13 females, 7 of whom were mothers, including 3 single mothers. 18 participants were in their 20s, 9 were in their 30s, 2 in their 40s and 1 in her 50s. 23 out of 30 were university educated, reflecting Fuchs' (2005) contention that participants in contemporary social movements tend to possess cultural capital. Several worked in the public or third sector and almost half had lived in Nottingham all of their lives so they knew the local context well. The majority were white with one British Pakistani, one Black British, one Chinese, and one white first generation Eastern European migrant. Participants noted the visible absence of BME (Black Minority Ethnic) anti-austerity activists and had tried, unsuccessfully, to address this by reaching out to ethnic minority communities.

The category of class was revealed to be interesting and complex; 15 participants identified as working class, 7 as middle class and the remaining 8 had an ambivalent relationship with class, having been raised in working class families but now considered to be middle class either through education, occupation, or marriage. This working class focus contradicts arguments about the predominance of middle class activists and offers a different perspective to previous research. Three participants suggested that they were "culturally middle class" but "economically working class" and what repeatedly emerged was the issue of being highly educated but having little job security, problematising how we define and understand class within the current context of uncertainty. While for some participants being working class was a key part of their identity, the majority found class problematic as they

considered the definitions to have changed and become more complicated in recent years. Despite this, participants were keen to emphasise their working class roots, which, for them, symbolised an authentic grounding for anti-austerity activism and which was constructed in opposition to middle class activism (a point that will recur in the data chapters). Participants, therefore, rarely spoke about identification with the middle class but did speak about the importance of working class upbringings, communities, and struggle.

However, other than one woman who strongly identified as a “working class woman”, the majority of women participants focussed on the importance of emphasising gender over class in the current context, influenced by associations between working class politics and men. Indeed, Charles (2000) notes that social movement theory has traditionally attempted to understand social movements in terms of class rather than gender and that there has been a pervasive private-public division between class and gender which results in the latter being absent from social movements’ discourses and theorising about them. This reflects so-called ‘old’ social movements’ (such as the labour movement) focus on class, made up of mainly men who, unlike women at the time, had access to the labour force (though, notably, this gendered dimension is largely ignored by mainstream theory). Therefore, women participants’ focus on gender over class perhaps reflects an effort to address this traditional dynamic by placing gender visibly at the centre of anti-austerity activism.

Furthermore, Charles (2000) asserts that traditional social cleavages, such as class and nationalism, dominate the UK context and that therefore ‘issues to do with women or nuclear disarmament are interpreted as class issues or as national issues because of the ways of seeing associated with traditional cleavages’ (Charles, 2000: 61). Yet, Charles (2000) contends that gender can be viewed as a traditional social cleavage, despite it being ignored by mainstream social movement

theorists, and that we need to take into account both gender and class when theorising about feminist movements. Speaking of newer feminist movements, she (2000: 61) argues that ‘it may be middle-class women who are mobilised into feminist movements, but it is their gender as well as their class which is significant; this suggests that gender should be considered as a significant social cleavage which is both new and traditional’. This intersection between class and gender and the ways in which participants construct and negotiate it is a topic that will re-emerge in the data chapters.

I have included here a table summarising the key demographic and other relevant information about participants along with their pseudonyms. While attempts were made to collect as much demographic information as possible, I did not request participants to fill out a questionnaire about their demographic information as I felt at the time that this would compromise my ability to gain participants and valuable data, given that participants were keen to be as anonymous as possible. Therefore, it is highly probable that more participants identify as disabled and LGBT than is listed but I have only provided information that was self-disclosed. This is perhaps something which I would change in future research, as it is not possible to return to participants and ask them for their demographic information post-research.

Participant demographics table

Pseudo-nym	Gender	Ethnicity	Class	Age	Education	Other
James	M	White	Family background/ economic – Working class	Early 20s	University, currently unemployed	Lived in Notts all his life

			Culturally – Middle class, so perhaps 'lower middle class'			
Tony	M	White	Does not identify with class	Mid 20s	University, currently unemployed	Lived in Notts all his life
Morris	M	White	Working class	Early 40s	Self-employed University	
Helen	F	White	Middle class	Late 20s	PhD	Lived in Notts all her life, was carer to her mother
Amin	M	British Pakistani	Working class background but now lower middle, upper working class	Mid 20s	University	Works in the public sector, lived in Notts all his life
Leonie	F	White	Working class	Late 30s	Dropped out of uni, doing OU degree	Works in third sector, single mother
Jack	M	White	Working class	Early 30s	University	Works for trade unions

Will	M	White	Middle class	Early 20s	University	
Beth	F	White	Working class background, culturally middle class	Mid 20s	PhD	
Hazel	F	White	Working class	Late 20s	School	Single mother
Henry	M	White	Working class	Early 20s	University	
Alex	M	White	Middle class	Early 30s	University, currently unemployed	
Lily	F	Chinese	Middle class	Early 20s	University	
Victor	M	Black	Working class in 3 model system but class has changed - background is deprived but considers himself lower- middle	Early 20s	University	
Owain	M	White	Working class	Early 20s	University	
Joe	M	White	Middle class	Mid 20s	University	
Amanda	F	White	Working class	Early 30s		Third sector in

						women's services
Alison	F	White	Middle class (working class background)	Late 30s	University	Married, mother
Mel	F	White	Working class	Early 50s		Disabled
Dermot	M	White	Working class	Mid 20s	University	
Martin	M	White	Working class	Early 30s	University	Public sector worker
Jared	M	White	Middle class	Mid 20s	University	Disabled
Harry	M	White	Working class	Early 30s	University	
Charlotte	F	White	Middle class, working class background	Late 30s	University	Single mother
Mary	F	White	Working class	Late 40s		Married mother, public sector worker
Dana	F	White	Working class	Late 30s		Mother, with partner, public sector

						worker
Adrian	M	White	Working class	Late 20s		
Anna	F	White first generation migrant from East Europe	Working/ lower middle by background but now middle? BBC survey – service class, highly educated but job insecurity	Late 20s	PhD	
Jacob	M	Black British	Working class	Early 20s		
Lydia	F	White	Middle class	Early 20s	University	Trans woman

Data analysis

As Bryman and Burgess (1994: 216) state, data are ‘voluminous, unstructured and unwieldy’, it is therefore crucial that the researcher begins data analysis early on in the research process. Fetterman (1998: 92) states that analysis begins ‘from the moment a fieldworker selects a problem to study and ends with the last word of the report’. To begin with, I analysed texts created by the movements and monitored the content of local and national newspapers in regards to anti-austerity activism in order to direct the study and provide context. As the research utilised an exploratory approach, data was analysed as it was collected in order to produce new ideas which could then be followed up in further

fieldwork (Brewer, 2000). Data analysis was therefore viewed as an on-going process that occurs simultaneously alongside data collection or generation. This was enabled by transcribing the interviews as soon after recording as possible, making notes during transcription and comparing these to the previous interviews by using mind-mapping software. Such an approach prevents the researcher from being overwhelmed by the quantity of data at the end of the study and helps to avoid the situation where more data is needed based on analysis when the researcher no longer has access to the field.

Thematic analysis, where themes are allowed to emerge naturally from the data (Fetterman, 1998), was used to analyse the data gathered during participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. I noted common or interesting themes and developed mind-maps of topics and themes which I then grouped into categories and linked together. As mentioned above, the focus of the research shifted and developed during my time in the field, with topics becoming prominent based on initial data collection and insights gathered during participation in local events. As I used an open, exploratory research strategy and analysed data as it occurred, I was able to follow the leads that emerged from the data and shape the research as it progressed. This resulted in the construction of the activist identity becoming a key theme of the research as well as the various ways that gender influenced political participation becoming central to the project. I therefore used later interviews to explore these topics in more depth.

By combining document analysis, participant observation, and interviews, I was able to compare my own analysis and interpretations with those of participants and establish a strong body of data, using the process of triangulation. Indeed, Reinharz (1992: 213) asserts that 'multimethod research creates the opportunity to put texts or people in contexts, thus providing a richer and far more accurate interpretation'. However, it is noted that I utilised document analysis and participant

observation to guide the focus of my interviews as well as to build trust with participants and that, in line with a feminist approach, I have decided to focus this project on the data gathered during interviews in order to place the voices of participants at the centre of the research.

Ethics and reflexivity

The research was conducted in accordance with the British Sociological Association's (BSA) ethical guidelines and received ethical clearance from the University's Sociology department. It is important that research is carried out within an ethical framework and that the researcher remains 'ethically engaged' throughout the research process. As Davies and Dodd (2002: 281) state:

Ethics are more than a set of principles or abstract rules that sit as an overarching entity guiding our research [...] ethics exist in our actions and in our ways of doing and practising our research; we perceive ethics to be always in progress, never to be taken for granted, flexible, and responsive to change.

Ethical considerations, then, are an on-going concern rather than a checklist to be ticked off at the beginning of the research, which I hope to have demonstrated throughout this chapter. Indeed, Gillan and Pickerill (2012: 135) argue that 'the check-box approach to ethics [...] may help deal with certain sorts of risk but is ultimately limited'.

As the research is situated within a symbolic interactionist approach, which holds that social interaction constructs knowledge, research ethics are considered to be relational and thus need to be people-centred. This means that the methods used need to 'respect the humanity of the participants in the study' (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 2). It is important for the researcher to assess the risks and costs of participating in the research study (Chesters, 2012; Corder et al, 2012). Participants were granted anonymity in order to protect their identities, reducing the risks

of taking part in the study and enabling them to speak openly during interactions. Pseudonyms have been used in the write-up of the study to ensure this. This is important given that the research is concerned with political activism and participants may not want to make their allegiances publicly known. The key concern is that the participant is protected and feels safe to speak openly about their experiences, reflecting the person-centred approach of a reflexive research ethics.

These considerations raise questions about the researcher's responsibility to their participants. The emphasis of the research is on the ways that participants understand their experiences and so their narratives should be central to the study. Indeed, it has been argued that researchers should '[tell] the stories of social movements through individual voices: making the personal political, situating knowledge within personal trajectories and journeys' (Gillan and Pickerill, 2012: 141). This also reflects the core principles of feminist research practice as discussed earlier. I have included extended quotations so that participant's voices are fairly and accurately represented. This will also enable the reader of the research to judge the researcher's interpretations and to form their own views of the participants' narratives.

Within reflexive research ethics, it is considered ethical to give something back to those who have given their time and thoughts freely to the researcher, something which researchers often neglect (Gillan and Pickerill, 2012). One way I 'gave back' to participants was through contributing to meetings and events as a participant and helping with organisational tasks for events (Cordner et al, 2012). Gillan and Pickerill (2012: 137) claim that 'the most useful immediate reciprocation involves "back office" work which is less visible but just as important as front line direct action'. Whilst this strategy raises questions concerning the researcher's role as participant or observer (discussed above) it is a relatively simple way to return time and effort to participants.

A more problematic way of demonstrating reciprocity is giving participants access to the data generated by the study (Cordner et al, 2012: 168). This can be problematic as it raises issues of how to reconcile multiple interpretations and whether the knowledge generated by the study should be relevant to the movement. Chesters (2012: 147) argues that we need to conduct research 'that is consistent with the ideas, voiced by social movements themselves'. In other words, our research should further the cause of the social movement we study. While I am sympathetic to anti-austerity activism (as discussed earlier), my principle role within the field was that of researcher, which involves being critical at all times in order to produce a valuable piece of research. At the same time, once the research is completed, my intentions, in line with feminist research ethics, are to feed back my research findings to the movements involved in order to help strengthen these groups, particularly from a gendered perspective.

Crucially, researchers must engage in reflexivity throughout the research process as 'a necessary methodological intervention about one's role as a researcher' (Cordner et al, 2012: 163), which involves 'a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference' (Davies, 2008: 4). As we have previously seen, it is argued that 'rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 17). Not only is reflexivity an ethical and epistemological decision, but it also improves the legitimacy of the data as it takes into account different aspects that may impact upon the data and aids the researcher in tackling these. Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 278) have termed this process 'validity-as-reflexive accounting'. It is now generally recognised that reflexivity is a 'part of good practice' (Brewer, 2000: 130). However, as Mason (2002: 66) states 'it is important not to under-estimate the reflexive challenge posed by analysing your own role within the research process'. Whilst it is important to be explicit about the researcher's biases, we are not always

conscious of these. It is hoped that by presenting the research decisions clearly and honestly the reader can make their own judgements about what biases the researcher may have and how these could have impacted the research.

This chapter began by exploring the epistemological and methodological foundations of the research, focussing especially on feminist research practice and symbolic interactionism. Having discussed these in detail I then explored the research methods used and provided the rationale for these choices. I have described the sample used, the data analysis methods, and ethical questions which have been engaged with throughout the research process. It is intended that this critical, reflexive methodological investigation will foreground the following analysis and that making the research process transparent will strengthen the research's credibility. The next chapter will present a detailed description of the local context in order to provide background about the relevant movements for the following analysis.

Chapter 4: The Local Context: Nottingham, UK Uncut, and the People's Assembly

The local context: Nottingham

Nottingham is the largest city in the East Midlands, built on a history of heavy industry that includes coal mining, manufacturing, and engineering. Between 2010 and 2014, the City Council faced cuts of £123 million, with a further £30 million of cuts planned in 2015/16. As the City Council (2015) states 'we're facing budget pressures like never before'. Since the austerity programme was initially announced in 2010, there has been an emergence of anti-austerity groups and campaigns across the city. At the height of anti-austerity activism in Nottingham in 2010-2013, there were several specific campaigns against the cuts that protested on a weekly basis, forming a vibrant and dynamic local activist scene. These included groups that campaigned against specific cuts such as Notts Save Our Services (which has since disbanded), feminist activism and groups operating from the Women's Centre such as Nottingham Women Campaign for Change, and local branches of wider national movements such as UK Uncut and the People's Assembly Against Austerity. These two movements have been the most popular and visible, protesting against the cuts since 2010 using a variety of direct action tactics combined with petitions and public meetings.

Somewhat apt, and drawn upon by anti-austerity groups, is Nottingham's legend of Robin Hood, the heroic outlaw who robbed from the rich to give to the poor. In fact, Nottingham has a long history of resistance politics, including the Luddite uprisings and the riots of 1832 when Nottingham Castle was burnt down (one of many other local riots at this time). More recently, there was the Miners' Strike of the 1980s which is still prominent in local memory and history. This history is reflected in the contemporary local scene with Nottingham being home to one of only five radical bookshops in the UK (a shop which has roots in another

local radical bookshop from the 1970s), the presence of an activist and community centre — The Sumac (est. 1985), and the Nottingham Women's Centre which has existed for 40 years (www.nottinghamwomenscentre.com, 2015). Much of the feminist anti-austerity activism is organised out of the centre and there has been a surge in local feminism, evidenced by the quickly growing popularity of a local feminism Facebook group (started two years ago and now with over 1000 members) and a rise in local feminist events. Participants reflect this general atmosphere of progressive politics and resistance, referring to Nottingham as a “left city” that is “alternative”, has a “buzz” and an “underground” activist scene where “a lot's going on”.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed descriptive account of the specific local setting where the research took place. It is important to remember, as Beth states, “austerity is a thread that runs through many campaigns”. Therefore, participants have been involved in various groups and campaigns that resist austerity, with anti-austerity activism being a broad area. However, given the prominence of the two movements UK Uncut and the People's Assembly, and the ways in which participants define the two in relation to one another, I will be focussing mainly on these, exploring some key features of the movements which participants referred to, namely that of organisational structure and the relationship between activism and party politics.

UK Uncut

UK Uncut is a grassroots movement that formed in October 2010 to protest against tax avoidance by large corporations and banks. Describing itself as ‘taking action to highlight the alternatives to the government's spending cuts’, UK Uncut (2010) argues that the cuts are ‘based on ideology, not necessity’ and seeks to highlight this perceived injustice by taking direct action against tax-avoiding corporations such as Starbucks, Vodafone, NatWest, Lloyds TSB, and Boots, which has local

significance having been founded in Nottingham. UK Uncut have been successful in creating a link in the public imagination between tax avoidance and public spending cuts, utilising the popular discourse of 'fairness' which is also used to legitimise austerity (Bramall, 2016: 34). We start to see how dominant ideologies can be reinterpreted and turned against themselves. In this respect, anti-austerity activism employs a 'hermeneutic of faith' (Ricoeur, 1981) which is 'an attempt to restore meaning to a narrative and its different voices and silences' (Levitas, 2012: 332). At the same time, such movements read austerity discourses through a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' which involves 'an attempt at unmasking disguised meanings and practical implications' (Levitas, 2012: 332). Thus, we see the complexities and dialectics present in anti-austerity activism. Similarly to how it draws on the 'common sense' of fairness, UK Uncut does not question the need to reduce the deficit, which is a point that has largely been accepted by the public, but instead argues that it should be reduced in a way that does not hit the most vulnerable the hardest. Given that tax avoidance is legal, UK Uncut has to find an alternative grounding for its argument, which it finds in the frame of morality.

According to its website, the first mention of 'UK Uncut' was on October 27th 2010 in the Twitter hashtag #UKUncut. This was the date of UK Uncut's first direct action when approximately 70 people formed a sit-in at Vodafone's flagship London store to protest against austerity measures announced one week earlier. From the outset, then, it is clear that social media played a central role in the organising and constitution of UK Uncut. After this single action group in London, Uncut quickly spread to 55 locations across the UK with a diverse range of participants; the movement (2010) states that 'everyone from pensioners to teenagers, veterans to newbies have already joined our actions in towns from Aberdeen to Aberystwyth'. There is no official membership; people join the movement by organising or attending an action near them (UK

Uncut, 2010). Uncut claims to be leaderless, having been formed on and organised through the Internet and has a strong virtual presence. Most participants discovered UK Uncut online. The UK Uncut Facebook page currently has more than 100,000 supporters who are subscribed to its posts (a number that has doubled in two years and is growing every day). The Notts Uncut Facebook page has almost 2,000 likes. Reflecting Castells (2012) notion of 'networked social movements', some participants contend that social media is a central feature of newer horizontal forms of activism. In fact, social media is perceived by participants to have changed the political landscape. Harry states that "a smart phone in the right hands is the nuclear bomb of the activist", emphasising the potential impact that social media can have as well as its accessibility. At the same time, UK Uncut remains concerned with the use of public spaces for protest, reflecting Castells' (2012) contention that networked movements combine online and offline spaces for activism.

Despite its claims to leaderlessness, within Nottingham there was a core group of around 8-10 activists who managed the Notts Uncut social media and organised many of their actions. This core group is included within my sample, as are others who had more casual links to the movement. While UK Uncut is still active, in Nottingham the movement peaked between 2010 and 2012; there are occasionally plans to revive it and participants describe it as currently "sleeping".

The People's Assembly

The main anti-austerity group currently active in Nottingham is the People's Assembly which is part of the national People's Assembly Against Austerity that acts as a platform for anti-austerity protests and events, attracting several celebrity supporters such as Owen Jones and Russell Brand. It was formed in 2013 and states '[t]here is no need for ANY cuts to public spending; no need to decimate public services; no need for unemployment or pay and pension cuts; no need for Austerity and privatisation. There IS an alternative', demonstrating a similar

message to UK Uncut. Whereas Notts Uncut was more horizontal and used consensus decision-making methods, the People's Assembly is a more vertically structured group that is mainly organised by one local activist (who is also part of my sample). This is a point of contention for some participants who choose not to be involved with the movement because of this. Reflecting their more organised approach, the People's Assembly support 'The People's Manifesto', a list of policies that the movement proposes to create a fairer society (see http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/what_we_stand_for). The People's Assembly national Facebook page has just over 53,000 likes and the local Nottingham page has almost 2,000 likes. Similarly to UK Uncut, though the People's Assembly does not claim to be mainly constituted online, Mary notes that "we have started doing a lot of our stuff [People's Assembly], events that we organise we set up Facebook events and that sort of thing and you get very quick shares of things and you get an impact quite quickly".

Although participants were involved in a range of anti-austerity activism, including UK Uncut and the People's Assembly, those who were solely involved with the People's Assembly did not speak about it in detail. In contrast, those who had been involved with UK Uncut spoke extensively about the movement, suggesting that there was a strong collective identity and loyalty to the group among participants. Several participants had attempted to be involved with the People's Assembly but had had negative experiences and many others who had been central to Notts Uncut refused to associate with the People's Assembly because of its organisational structure and perceived corruption. It was clear from the outset that participants constructed the People's Assembly as the antithesis of UK Uncut, with the former representing the negative aspects of political organising and the latter, the positive. Therefore, the People's Assembly functioned as the undesirable 'other' to UK Uncut, and was used to construct and position Uncut as the more ideal form of

anti-austerity activism for many participants. This does not mean that participants were uncritical of Uncut; reflexivity was a key quality emphasised by participants, however it does mean that where particular groups and organisations were spoken about, UK Uncut was the main subject, with the People's Assembly acting as its foil. Therefore, the following discussion reflects this focus.

Working within or outside of the system: Hierarchical versus horizontal movements

There was a clear distinction made by participants between working “within the system” by belonging to or working alongside political parties and working “outside of the system”. This distinction tended to correlate to two other characteristics – whether a group's organisational structure was perceived to be horizontal or hierarchical. While it is the case that not all participants fit neatly within one side of these distinctions, it tended to be the case that those who supported horizontal forms of activism defined this in opposition to more hierarchically organised campaigns and that this organisational structure was seen as a defining feature.

UK Uncut is spoken about by participants as a clear example of this non-hierarchical, horizontal form of activism and contrasted to the People's Assembly which represents a more hierarchical, structured organisation that is perceived to be rife with internal politics:

Whereas the core people of UK Uncut, there was no hierarchy, for the other people at Uncut the issue was the most important thing, I would say. The issue was the thing, I couldn't give a crap about the internal politics, and I don't think they did, I think they were just happy to have other people around them doing the cause. Whereas, People's Assembly, I think UK Uncut, everyone was welcome, as well, and I don't think that's the case with People's Assembly. UK

Uncut definitely everyone was welcome, the more the merrier, and it was very focussed on that whereas there's so much other bollocks with People's Assembly. (Tony)

Here we not only see how UK Uncut and the People's Assembly are constructed in opposition to one another, but also the emphasis placed on issue-based politics, where "it is about the issue, not the brand" (Morris). In this respect, participants claim that UK Uncut "just happens to be the UK brand name that was effective in getting people out there and protesting" (Morris). Participants suggest that there are similarities and movement between different groups:

I don't know where UK Uncut starts and where UK Uncut finishes. 'Cause, it doesn't have a constitution, or membership, things like this, so I guess Occupy, Anonymous [...] they're very similar, things, trying to achieve very similar things and just different names have been given to it. (Tony)

James suggests that the name UK Uncut was "only really there to provide this sort of unitary idea for which people can go behind". Tony reinforces this:

Maybe that's why I'd give a leaflet out [for Uncut], 'cause I think it's for the actual cause, and maybe that's why I wouldn't give a leaflet out for the People's Assembly because I feel that I'm just promoting something for someone else to try and jump around and move around and that and all their political manoeuvrings. So, yeah, it's more about the issue. I think for that it makes me feel like it's purer. When I say it's purer, I think that's what I mean.

We see how participants construct Uncut as a natural, spontaneously occurring event that is not tainted by internal politics or power dynamics, implying that horizontality and issue-based politics are more

authentic. However, despite this emphasis on the issue over the organisation and the fluidity of the movement's boundaries, we will see in later chapters that the brand Notts Uncut was held in high regard by participants and fiercely protected. Nevertheless, for participants, a key advantage of such issue-based politics is that they overcome the "petty factionalism" and "fragmentation" that characterises the Left (Morris, Helen). Given that the focus is on the issue, not the organisation, there is opportunity for groups to unite and work together.

Unlike other fragmented and hierarchical Left groups, UK Uncut is perceived to be inclusive and welcoming (as demonstrated by Tony's comment above). Here, the permeable boundaries of the movement resulted in Uncut having a diverse range of participants. Leonie remarks:

There wasn't a typical kind of person. I mean within our group in Nottingham we were really really wide ranging. I mean we had... students [...] actual proper political anarchists rather than the type that the press like to paint the picture of [...] trade unionists, we had pensioners. I mean I was a fairly typical, kind of, married, two kids, mortgage, civil service job, you know, not the sort of person you would necessarily expect to get involved in that kind of direct action, but I think that was the beauty of it, because within the actions that Uncut took there was a role for everybody.

Crucially, participants assert that those who were involved with Notts Uncut were not just 'the usual suspects'. Helen remarks:

You would also find people coming along who hadn't been to previous protests. So you would find people turning up saying "I read about it online, I heard about it, I was interested so I came" which you don't often get in a lot of kind of left organisations.

Again we see the centrality of social media to UK Uncut's organising, as well as the ways in which participants position Uncut as different to and better than other left organisations. However, rather than claiming that Uncut's participants were totally atypical, Helen suggests that "there's kind of a solid core who are the people who have been involved in everything forever" but that "what UK Uncut started to do was bring other groups into that". It seems that participants were eager to stress the populist character of the movement by emphasising the "ordinariness" of its participants rather than focusing on core individuals' extensive histories of activism.

UK Uncut: A 'new' politics?

Participants construct UK Uncut as a unique, new form of politics in order to detach it from negative connotations of 'the left' and party politics. Tony states that "Uncut *seems* to have come out of nowhere and it doesn't have that connection with, it doesn't seem to have the baggage of... 'the left', to go along with it". The seemingly spontaneous emergence of Uncut is significant as the movement has no history or Left roots, allowing participants to feel that Uncut really is a different, new form of politics. Participants achieve this erasure of history and subsequent positioning of Uncut as unique through the shared origin myth where the movement spontaneously emerged via social media and developed from there:

The way I *perceive* it is, I do perceive it as a lot less hierarchical and it is genuinely based from this kind of like, from Twitter and from Facebook, social media movement that a few people have, come online and... shared a, interest, passion, about the issues and it's kind of gone from there and snowballed from there. (Tony)

Likewise, James states "We didn't have a framework [...] we are not an ideological group with a solid thing, it was always how people came

together that produced Uncut". Here emphasis is placed on relationships, as well as the horizontal, non-hierarchical organisation of the movement. Uncut is largely perceived to be less restrictive and more inclusive than other Left movements, especially the People's Assembly, because of its lack of strict and rigid organisational structures. Participants refer to this horizontality as the "Uncut model" and contend that it reflects a "true democracy" where individuals can participate fully and decisions are made collectively. For many this lack of hierarchy and authority is central to Uncut's appeal. Will states: "I didn't want someone telling me what to do".

Indeed, Tony asserts that:

They [left organisations] had no control over Uncut. You know the hierarchy of these little things, they didn't have the control over Uncut. Well no one had control over Uncut, it was a natural, pure thing.

This spontaneity affords authenticity to the movement by distancing it from any negative associations and instead constructing UK Uncut as "natural" and "organic". Participants speak of how the movement "grew" and "evolved", as well as referring to its "birth" and "death" and describing Notts Uncut as currently "sleeping". James notes how the local Uncut groups "all set up organically, they fell, they grew again, completely independent". Participants also use natural imagery when describing the wider activist scene, speaking about "waves" of activity, "ebbs and flows", "peaks", "troughs", and "lulls" in activism, implying that this is the natural order of things. There is a sense that such processes are external to the individuals involved, with the movement taking on a life of its own. Indeed, Leonie speaks of how Uncut "just turned into this massive behemoth of a project" invoking ideas of a large beast with a mind of its own. Likewise, participants speak about "energy" and "momentum" as something external to, and independent of, the

individuals involved; it is conceived of as a general mood or atmosphere. James demonstrates this: “during the initial couple of months there was a lot of momentum, we weren’t trying to do things, they were happening and we just sort of went with it”. Significantly, participants equate ‘natural’ with good, with the implication being that the movement is thus untainted or marred by human intervention or “baggage”.

Yet, at the same time, participants speak about “building” momentum and pushing the movement forwards, recognising individuals’ conscious efforts to create and sustain momentum. There is a tension between this organic, spontaneous process which participants speak of and accounts of the work involved in activism. Furthermore, though it is not openly spoken about, participants are aware of Uncut’s alternative ‘origin’ story that contradicts this spontaneous emergence. In this alternative mythscape, Uncut was formed by a group of 20-something Oxbridge graduates in a London pub in response to the *Private Eye* article revealing Vodafone’s tax avoidance. The existence of different accounts concerning Uncut’s beginnings is not inconsequential. Polletta (2006) contends that such origin stories are deliberately constructed to convey movements as spontaneous and contagious; what matters is not the ‘trueness’ of the account but the stories that are told and their effects. Participants perhaps distance themselves from the alternative origin myth because it implies a level of organisation and type of activist which is oppositional to their own conception of activism, which we will see in later chapters.

‘New’ activist politics versus ‘old’ party politics

Participants not only construct UK Uncut in ways that distance it from other Left organisations such as the People’s Assembly, but also in ways that separate it from party politics. This is reflected by how some participants reject the ‘political’ in ‘political activist’ because of its connotations. Further, some participants suggest that UK Uncut is not “politics”, Will demonstrates this view:

We just said anyone could turn up, we were apolitical, we didn't say we support this political party or this, we just said we're not supporting any of that. And we always had the rule that you can't bring any banners that had a party name, so the Socialist Party couldn't turn up with Socialist Party banners because we didn't want it to be, it wasn't a political event. We weren't there saying oh, we're this party and this is our view, we're there saying we're all individuals from, doesn't matter where we're from (laughs), we're all here for a common purpose.

Similarly, Leonie contends that "I think you have got to get away from the politics and focus on what your actual issues are". We are again reminded of issue-based politics (for want of a better word) and how this is perceived to be a radical break from traditional left activism.

It becomes clear that in rejecting 'the political' participants mainly mean party politics, representing a deep and widespread disillusionment with the mainstream political system. There is a sense that party politics has failed individuals, with participants declaring political parties "all the same", referring to the broken promises of the Coalition government and the trust lost because of this: "you can't trust any of them, they all say the same and then they do something different". Reflecting Della Porta's (2015) claim that we are witnessing a 'crisis of responsibility', participants do not feel that there is a party that represents them, describing most politicians as being out of touch with the lived experiences of citizens.

Within this environment of disillusionment and distrust, participants construct direct action as a "more active form of activism" which is dynamic and disruptive, in opposition to the traditional politics of the ballot box which is portrayed as stagnant and irrelevant. This contrast is demonstrated by several participants, with activism being perceived to

be a more participatory and “real” politics, compared to voting which is pointless and ineffective. Will states:

Well going to the ballot box, because there’s so many people in the country all with different views, you need to get a lot of them to say no to something, for it to make any difference. And that’s very hard to do. But with an action you kind of speak to the people just at street level, you’re almost having a chat, a lot of people when we were doing actions would come up and have a chat with us and that’s kind of, that kind of worked really.

Participants therefore define political action in alternative ways, outside of mainstream political institutions. Morris demonstrates this, speaking of “the protest movement” which he defines as people who are “questioning the way that things are being done through other means than the ballot box”.

So far we have seen that participants construct UK Uncut in ways that distinguish it as a unique, positive, and new form of politics which overcomes the disadvantages of traditional Left organisations and party politics. Central to this are the movement’s focus on issues rather than the organisation and its horizontal structure. The People’s Assembly serves as the representation of the negative features of politics, or ‘the other’, which Uncut challenges and is perceived to overcome. However, while many participants are enthusiastic about this new issue-based horizontal model of politics, some are more critical, raising key problems with how such organisational structures function. Morris criticises issue-based politics for attending to the symptom rather than the cause of social issues. Whilst acknowledging that:

[b]y not having an underlying political philosophy, by just being an issue-based protest it allowed a solidarity between those people that if you were to debate political philosophy

[with], it would soon become petty factionalism, and it would break up.

He goes on to say:

But again, it's limited. Because you solve this issue... and what's next? It's another issue and another issue, and another issue, and another issue... it's almost, to use a medical analogy, it's like, I don't know, if you bang your head on the wall every morning, your issue is you've got a headache. Your issue-based protest is that you take aspirin. Your political based protest is that you stop banging your head on the wall because that's your problem.

Furthermore, the way such movements tend to come together and dissipate quickly is a potential flaw of the model. For, although issue-based politics may help to temporarily unite a fragmented Left, their short life-span may prevent the development of solidarity between individuals and loyalty to the movement. Yet, despite claims that the issue matters and the brand does not, participants have strong ties to 'Notts Uncut'. Indeed, participants are fiercely protective of the brand, expressing anger when other groups encroached upon or "infiltrated" Uncut actions. Morris states "we owned the Notts Uncut brand" and explains that the group's banner is a symbol of collective identity: "[the banner's] fundamental, this is an Uncut protest so that's who we are, we are Uncut".

Moreover, Jack questions how non-hierarchical the movement really is, arguing that there need to be visible democratic structures in place. For Jack, a key drawback of Uncut is its lack of organisation and accountable leaders, thus he prefers to be involved with the People's Assembly. Phillips (1991: 133) demonstrates this view, drawing on Freeman's *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* to argue that 'all organisations have their procedures for making decisions, and that when a group claims to be

without them, it is evading the crucially democratic task of keeping such procedures under control'. Therefore, the biggest threat to democracy within such movements is their supposed non-hierarchical organisation which often conceals hidden power structures. Given that 'it does not look like power [...] it is therefore rarely brought to account', whereas, '[p]ower that is acknowledged can be subjected to mechanisms of democratic control' (Phillips, 1991: 134). Morris raises concerns about the emergence of "de facto leaders" and notes how, in practice, such a model falls apart. Amin agrees that a clearer organisational structure is needed but is reluctant to make such a comment, remarking "I'm going to hate myself for saying this". Clearly, there are tensions between the ideal and the reality and like some participants, Amin feels that the horizontal model is an ideal that does not work in practice. Further, his comment suggests that he is aware that this view is not the common narrative within Notts Uncut and his reluctance to question this narrative may reflect concern about being disloyal to the group and its values, again demonstrating the strong group identity.

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of the local context and relevant movements in order to provide background to the following in-depth analysis of participants' narratives. It establishes the wider activist environment within which these narratives are situated and from which they have emerged. The following chapter will explore the affective dimension of political participation, focusing on the central questions of what motivates and sustains local anti-austerity activism.

Chapter 5: The Affective, the Normative, and the Everyday: Exploring the Motivating and Sustaining Factors of Anti-Austerity Activism

We have seen that emotions have been side-lined in social movement studies because of their traditional association with irrationality and researchers' desire to distance themselves from this. I have unpicked this association and its related binary constructions of male/female and public/private, which will recur throughout these chapters, asserting that there is a need to develop an in-depth understanding of the affective and cultural dimensions of political engagement. Further, while the focus of research tends to be on the initial engagement phase of participation (Corrigall-Brown, 2012), I contend that it is vital to pay attention to the latent phases of movements in order to better understand individuals' everyday experiences of political engagement and how this engagement is sustained over time. It is here that the affective dimension plays a central role in answering the question of 'why' individuals become and remain mobilised for political action, rather than merely 'how' they do.

This chapter explores what motivates and sustains anti-austerity activism within the context of continued austerity. By invoking a cultural approach, insights are revealed about the centrality of the affective dimension of political engagement and an in-depth understanding of the key motivating and sustaining factors can be achieved. Overall, participants are motivated by a combination of the emotional and normative ideals, being moved to act by feelings about perceived current injustice. Therefore, anti-austerity activism is not simply concerned with impacting upon policy or defending social protections of the past, it is also about a potential better future and what it means to be human. The normative values that motivate and sustain anti-austerity activism are constructed in direct opposition to neoliberal capitalist values that are

perceived to be dehumanising. However, at the same time as actively fighting against these neoliberal values, participants draw on neoliberal responsabilisation discourses to justify doing activism at an individual level, revealing the tensions that exist when it comes to resisting such a pervasive force as neoliberalism which structures activists' daily lives and which we are all complicit in upholding.

Notably, unlike the following chapters which highlight the gendered differences in experiences of local anti-austerity activism, this chapter reveals the common motivating and sustaining factors for activism that cross gender differences, with women and men providing largely similar explanations and justifications for their participation in local anti-austerity activism. As we will see in later chapters, the key exception to this is how women with children construct their activism as being part of their duty as mothers. However, this is linked to the relationship between private caring roles and activism and constitutes a response to the gendered barriers and exclusions which women face in participating politically; therefore it will be discussed in this context in a later chapter. To begin with, I turn to the question what motivates and sustains anti-austerity activism?

The affective and normative as motivations

Participants are motivated by a combination of emotions and normative ideals, being moved to act by anger and indignation at injustice. Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012: 44) highlight that 'activists' righteous anger, discontent, resentment, indignation, and mistrust, for instance, represent deeply moral reactions, evoked by transgression of normative boundaries'. In this respect, participants question the status quo, arguing that society is not how it should be. Joe speaks about the "unfairness" of the current situation, arguing that society is currently "wrong" and "we need to pull together to change it". Owain questions "the way society is run" and Lily contends that "society shouldn't be this way". Indeed, Turner and Killian (1987: 242) contend that 'the common element in the

norms of most, and probably all, movements is the conviction that existing conditions are unjust'. Significantly it is an emotional response to this perceived injustice that motivates participants to do activism, signifying that emotions and morals combine to produce action. Castells (2012: 15) notes that for movements to form, sentiments need to be mobilised and Jasper (1997: 126) asserts that 'the passion for justice is fuelled by anger over existing injustice'. Owain states that he "hates injustice" and is moved to act by his anger at the current situation. Likewise, Beth says "I'm quite political in that I get very irate [...] always angry and wanting to do something about it". Certainly, anger and indignation at existing injustices fuel action (Jasper, 1997: 126). In fact, Martin says "I think there is a lot of anger that is still there, kind of bubbling under the surface", suggesting that this needs to be tapped into by activists to galvanise support. Similarly, Charlotte suggests that "we should be more angry, I think we should be protesting more, we should be demonstrating more".

However, at the same time as acknowledging that anger can incite action, some participants suggest that it is detrimental to activism, as Joe says, "people tend to think that being angry about everything is a positive, can be a positive trait, whereas I don't agree". Furthermore, Martin asserts that anti-austerity activism needs to offer a positive alternative in order to sustain people's involvement and to develop a stronger movement: "so I think there is anger there and there is energy, but doing that all the time — getting people on the streets all the time won't work unless people think that it is leading to something positive". Whilst anger acts as a motivation, Martin suggests that this needs to be translated into longer lasting, sustainable emotions and given a clear direction. In this vein, Jasper (1997: 49) suggests that:

Discrete ideas and moral values can be packaged together into a worldview or ideology. For example, emotions such

as anger or outrage and cognitions such as attributions of blame together form an injustice frame.

Gamson (1992) explores how 'injustice frames' are produced and used to spur people to action by combining emotions and defining a clear target to blame. Likewise, Jasper (1997: 107) contends that:

Activists must weave together a moral, cognitive, and emotional package of attitudes. By framing the problem as, say, "big business", or "instrumentalism", they suggest a moral judgement: disregard or abuse of humans by bureaucracy. The proper emotion shifts from dread to outrage. There is someone to blame.

This gives activists a target for their anger and a clear direction, as well as drawing on moral values and translating a more passive emotion such as dread into an active emotion that forms the basis for action — outrage. Furthermore, Adrian suggests that channelling his anger into activism is "therapeutic... 'cause it's like, yeah, my anger can't go at the world 'cause the world doesn't owe fucking anyone anything but it can go at the injustices". However, the emphasis is still placed on a 'negative' emotion, which Martin wishes to move away from in order to start building a positive movement. In fact, Solnit (2005: 28) contends that the nature of 'adversarial activism' leads to an obsession with the enemy which can hinder movements' progress.

A key question which emerges, then, is whether a movement that is 'anti' by name and goals is capable of being anything but adversarial and defined by this opposition. Certainly, for some theorists this antagonism need not be a negative thing, as Mouffe (2005: 30) contends:

A well-functioning democracy calls for a clash of legitimate democratic political positions [...] such confrontations should provide collective forms of identification strong

enough to mobilise political passions. If this adversarial configuration is missing, passions cannot be given a democratic outlet and the antagonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered.

For Mouffe, then, the development of an ‘us versus them’ approach is central to democracy in that it mobilises individuals through their feelings of belonging to a particular group and helps to maintain the pluralistic nature of the public sphere. Furthermore, Mouffe (2005: 25) recognises the role of the affective dimension in political engagement, arguing that it is passions which motivate people to engage with politics.

Participants often speak of activism as motivated and sustained by emotions, referring to the affective dimension of political engagement more generally. Adrian suggests that activism involves “channelling emotions full-stop, not just anger”. Martin asserts that he gets involved with issues “that I feel”, Amanda speaks of how the current situation “breaks my heart”, and Charlotte remarks “I am sad about how things are going”. There is clearly a strong emotional dimension to participants’ motivations for doing activism and, as shown above, this is combined with concerns about the normative and morality. In fact, Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012: 57) suggest that ‘the most important emotions in social movements are morally based emotions’. Furthermore, Jasper’s (2011: 291) notion of ‘moral batteries’ draws our attention to the combination and interaction of positive and negative emotions, where anger at injustice is combined with hope for change and this combination of negative and positive emotions (as in a battery) energises action. Indeed, Jasper (2014: 38) asserts that ‘emotions provide the motivational thrust of morality’. Likewise, Castells (2012) remarks that it is a combination of outrage at existing injustice with hope for a better future that propels action. Therefore, it is a combination of emotions with morals that produces action.

It is important to recognise that while anti-austerity activism is a response to austerity, it is not solely concerned with changing government policy. Indeed, if this was the case then the question arises of why many activists have not given up, considering that the austerity measures have largely been unaltered by protests. Instead, I contend that activists are concerned with spreading wider moral and normative ideals of equality, justice, empathy, community, and humanity, which I will explore throughout this chapter. These values are constructed in opposition to the dominant instrumental values of neoliberal capitalism which participants expressly reject as “unjust”. Furthermore, I argue that we need to problematise ‘success’ and critically consider what this means within the context of anti-austerity activism. Most obviously, ‘success’ would seem to be reversing the public spending cuts made by the government and changing policy, perhaps even voting in an anti-austerity party. However, while some participants perceive this to be a key goal of the movement, there are many who reject working within ‘the system’ or who also recognise that the movement is about more than achieving a clear-cut goal. In this respect, activists enact ideals of democracy and humanism, shifting the focus to the means rather than the end and emphasising the *process* by forging spaces within the present where the future of these ideals is imagined and enacted.

Solnit (2005: 117) asserts:

If your activism is already democratic, peaceful, creative, then in one small corner of the world these things have triumphed. Activism, in this model, is not only a toolbox to change things but a home in which to take up residence and live according to your beliefs, even if it’s a temporary and local place, this paradise of participating, this vale where souls get made.

Solnit draws our attention to the affective dimension of politics and brings in ideas of humanity with her use of the term 'souls'. This approach is deeply emotional and appeals to a sense of morals, as John Jordan, activist and writer, remarks: 'We are trying to build a politics of process, where the only certainty is doing what feels right at the right time and in the right place' (cited in Solnit, 2005: 135-136). Such ideas of 'success', or even the rejection of it, break with the instrumental reasoning of capitalism where everything has to be justified as a means to an end. As Holloway (2010: 33) asserts, just doing something for its own sake can be a 'crack' in capitalism by breaking these dominant values. In this respect, 'success' is simply resistance.

We can perhaps draw comparisons between anti-austerity activism and Thompson's (1971) criticism of the economic reductionism of explanations of the eighteenth century food riots. He (1971: 78) contends that the people revolting were 'informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights of customs, and in general that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community'. Furthermore, he remarks that such beliefs were 'passionately held'. Similarly, within anti-austerity activism there is an appeal being made to a previous better condition which has deteriorated and a sense that it is the 'ordinary people' who are making this appeal (Della Porta, 2013), as Holloway (2010: 5) asserts, anti-capitalism is 'the story of ordinary people'. Significantly, there is also a sense that activists are appealing to a better future, advocating a more positive approach. Della Porta (2013) contends that re-imagining democracy is at the centre of anti-austerity activism, with movements criticising the current, corrupt incarnation of the concept and instead appealing to a rediscovery of the ideal. Likewise, Harvey (2007: 206) suggests that demands to bring back economic, political, and cultural equality and justice and democratic governance are not about returning to a 'golden age' but about reinventing these concepts to deal with contemporary contexts. In fact, Jasper (2014: 31)

contends that ‘facts never motivate action by themselves (nor do norms) [...] they must be combined with outraged reactions over present conditions and a pleasing hope for the future’. Solnit (2005: 117) identifies that there is a positive, alternative-building element of activism (like Martin desires) and that this can exist alongside its antagonistic aspect: ‘you could describe activism as having two primary strains: the attempt to change something problematic outside itself and the attempt to build something better’.

In attempting to build this better future, activists emphasise the centrality of caring about others and deliberately construct this in opposition to neoliberal capitalist values, which participants associate with a selfish individualistic attitude that neglects humanity. We start to see how participants emphasise collectivism above the current trend of individualism. Joe contends that “it’s that kind of attitude that I just can’t make any sense of, you know, it’s giving to people in need, in desperate need, is wrong but spending it on luxuries for yourself is fine... it’s that kind of self-centred thinking that I want to get away from”. Amanda links this selfish attitude to Conservative (neoliberal) ideology proclaiming that “I’m not a Tory bastard, that I’m not just out for myself, that I do want to create a caring sharing world”. Likewise, Charlotte, Alex, and Mel speak of the “greed” and “selfishness” of “Tory ideology”, contrasting the focus on individual wealth and profit with caring for others and community values. Indeed, at the root of anti-austerity activism is this resistance to neoliberal capitalism with its instrumental values of competition and individualism. In response, participants emphasise values that combine an emotional response with morals and that are grounded in humanist ideals.

Empathy – a key motivator

For many participants, their motivation to do activism is rooted in empathy and caring about others. Charlotte comments that her reasons for first getting involved were “just sort of an empathy” and Amanda

describes her activism as “active compassion”. In the same way, Lampert (2005: 20) speaks of ‘radical compassion’ which drives individuals to action in order to change the reality of those whose pain we not only recognise but feel. Likewise, Jasper (2014: 31) remarks that ‘we must observe the emotions involved in the imagination: empathy and sympathy for the imagined others, which can lead to indignation on their behalf’. This element of ‘imagined’ loyalty and connection is significant as participants do not necessarily know those who they emphasise with and often draw on a shared common humanity, rather than a tangible relationship with others, as a motivation for doing activism. In a similar way, Castells (2012) stresses the importance of empathy in networked social movements that span large geographical areas and where individuals are connected via communication technologies. Importantly, Lampert emphasises being moved to act by empathy, contending that we must not view empathy as an end in itself but as a spur to social activism. He (2005: 170) uses the term ‘social activism’ because of the way that such activism is rooted in caring about others, motivating individuals to act for social change. Similarly, Agosta (2011) observes that we need to combine empathy with ethics in order to be propelled to action as empathy informs us about how the other is feeling, while ethics tells us what to do about this. Alternatively, Slote (2007) suggests that empathy is a distinct moral emotion that involves this benevolent desire to improve the other’s condition as the capacity to feel like the other and to imagine their situation is enough to spur one into action.

In fact, many participants share the idea that while on a personal level they may be in an advantaged and comfortable position, they are motivated to act out of empathy for other people’s plight. Dermot remarks that despite the fact that “I don’t need to change anything, necessarily”, his motivation for doing activism is “because I have empathy”. Mary contends that “We have to fight for everybody. I could just go oh well I’m alright, but that doesn’t help society generally and I

think it is unjust and I think our society is becoming very unbalanced in terms of wealth". Here, we see concerns shared by other participants about inequality and the distribution of wealth as well as a concern for the collective as a whole, rather than for herself as an individual. Therefore, participants emphasise putting others above oneself. Adrian notes how "it's usually questioning for someone else and not for myself" and that even though he may feel uncomfortable, he stands up for others "because this is important for this person that I do this". Moreover, participants lament a wider societal shift away from collectivism and towards individualism, which they associate with neoliberal capitalism, and wish to instead assert values of empathy and humanity. Likewise, Martinez (2002) asserts that 'it's about recovering the collectivity. One of the greatest harms that capitalism has done to us is the degradation of value of solidarity and community' (cited in Chatterton, 2005: 557).

Significantly, Adrian speaks about how he is motivated by empathy for "people's plights" and that he has always felt the need to stand up for those who are facing injustice, even from childhood: "I mean one of the earliest incidents I remember as a kid was my cousin throwing stones at another kid and me being upset about that". Here the affective comes into play again with Adrian's emotional response motivating action. Furthermore, there is a suggestion that empathy is an innate, human response to injustice, a sentiment which is echoed by other participants. Alex ties having empathy to a wider notion of what it means to be human, stating that "having the capacity for empathy" means "to be human in that sense". Similarly, Lampert (2005: 175) suggests the possibility of 'understanding compassion as an actual, empiric, day-to-day, universal human phenomenon' and Rifkin (2009) suggests that empathy is at our core nature, demonstrated by how we act in our everyday lives. However, he also provides a warning that we should be careful not to trivialise empathy and ergo lose its meaning, particularly at a time when it has become a 'buzzword' in politics (Rifkin, 2009: 177).

Nonetheless, Rifkin (2009: 43) contends that:

A radical new view of human nature has been slowly emerging and gaining momentum, with revolutionary implications for the way we understand and organize our economic, social and environmental relations in the centuries to come. We have discovered *Homo empathicus*.

Importantly, Rifkin uses the term 'discovered' to signify that we have now become aware of something that has always existed. He identifies a potential biological basis for empathy, exploring the scientific discovery of 'mirror neurons' which 'allow humans — and other animals — to grasp the minds of others "as if" their thoughts and behaviours were their own' (2009: 83). Crucially, this process is produced 'by feeling, not by thinking', emphasising the emotional roots of empathy, though this statement reinforces the problematic separation made between thinking and feeling. While Rifkin (2009: 84) contends that empathy is part of human nature, indeed he asserts 'we are wired for empathy — it is our nature and what makes us social beings', he also suggests that particular conditions are more likely to encourage its development, and that competitive, individualistic capitalism hinders it. Similarly, Hope (2014) speaks of how capitalism is hierarchical and plays into the competitive part of our nature but that 'we have a collaborative side, too, but it takes a different set of conditions to bring this out in us'. Like Rifkin (2009), Hope (2014) emphasises the centrality of empathy and suggests that it is not only part of human nature but that it is a significant feature of what makes us human. Indeed, Hope (2014) emphasises the need to create 'an environment where patience and empathy flourish'.

However, assumptions of human nature rely on the existence of a universal 'core' of humanity which remains once all other layers are stripped away. This is problematic because although, in theory, ignoring differences and appealing to a common humanity should give individuals

an equal standing, in practice, it can result in denying real differences that prevent people from being treated the same (Phillips, 1991: 53). In fact, Phillips (1991: 57) contends that ‘impartiality is not just a matter of abstracting from difference in order to identify a lowest common denominator. The very idea that there *is* a lowest common denominator [...] turns out to be weighted in favour of certain groups’. Crucially, she (1991: 36) argues that the ‘abstract individual’ is a patriarchal category and that to accept this abstract, disembodied, individual is ‘silently accepting his masculine shape’. Key questions about the gendered dimension of political participation are raised, which will be explored in the next chapter. Questions are also raised concerning tensions between universalism and difference, casting a significant shadow on attempts to build understanding upon ideas of a common humanity or a universal human nature.

Nevertheless, participants utilise ideas of a common humanity to galvanise and gain support by drawing on a wider human connection. Harvey (2007: 178) suggests that as dispossession is fragmented, it is difficult to fight without recourse to universal principles. In fact, Touraine (2014: 57) suggests that morality can function as a unifying force:

If we are to successfully resist the threat of destruction, we need to identify a principle strong enough to mobilize us against the omnipotence of profit: only a principle which is moral as well as social can stand up to the power of money.

Hazel demonstrates this, arguing that everyone having enough food to live is “a basic human principle”, again tying back to the need for empathy and caring for others which form an emotional response to injustice. There is a connection made between empathy and morality, demonstrated by Joe who remarks that he is motivated to do activism by his “social conscience”. Similarly, Jasper (1997: 111) contends that ‘the

complex emotion of compassion, important for many protest movements, further shows the connection between emotion and morality, for it is a frequent spur to moral action'. In fact, Rifkin (2009: 119) claims that 'the maturation of empathy and the development of a moral sense are one and the same thing'.

Moreover, Della Porta (2013: 2) contends that austerity measures 'are attacking widespread conceptions of humanity'. She (2013: 15) speaks of activists' indignation remarking that 'indignant is a definition of the self which manifests the outrage at the disrespect for the right of a human being, which then resonates with a widespread claim: dignity'. Similarly, participants speak of the need to respect individuals as human beings and tie this to caring while also contrasting it to capitalist values. Jared contends that we need to care about others, particularly the "invisible" members of society because "they're affected by austerity just like all of us but we ignore them because we're thinking about ourselves and just trying to make our own ends meet but we view ourselves as worth more than them". Reinforcing Della Porta's (2013) contention, Jared ties this lack of caring and empathy to ideas of human worth and value, which participants link to capitalism's ideology of "profit before people". Jared argues that we need to respect people's humanity and their inherent worth rather than attaching a value to individuals based on their productivity or monetary worth. Like Hope (2014) and Rifkin (2009), participants suggest that the current environment of individualist capitalism hinders the development of empathy. In response, participants attempt to reverse the status quo by emphasising caring and putting others before themselves. Indeed, Mel contends that "any campaign and particularly the anti-austerity [movement is about] starting to care about people again".

Significantly, participants frame their case against austerity and for activism in terms of humanity rather than social class. This is not to say that class does not matter to participants; for several participants being

working class is a central part of their identity, and there is a widespread recognition of the underlying class dimension of austerity. At the same time, I have shown that many participants have an ambivalent relationship with class because of how they perceive its definition to have changed and complicated in recent years. Further, it appears to be a tactical decision to minimise the presence of class within anti-austerity discourses. There are two key reasons for this; firstly, participants are aware that social class is not currently a popular topic and suggest that to frame austerity resistance in solely class terms would not appeal to the wider public. Harry contends that “austerity just seems to be the latest way, the most palatable way of... England retreating back into a Victorian based obvious class ridden system [...] austerity is to create re-establishment of an obvious class system”. He goes on to say that “there’s the proverb that ‘the devil’s greatest trick was to convince everyone that he didn’t exist’”. Harry suggests that neoliberal politics has deliberately obscured social class in order to convince individuals that class does not exist and therefore does not matter. By doing so, it undermines the potential for and power of class-based movements to develop and gain popular appeal, thereby eliminating the threat of resistance to those in power. Secondly, as I will show in coming chapters, the existence of gendered barriers to and exclusions from activism are explained by participants as a symptom of the dominance of white men in anti-austerity activism and their concern with class politics, to the neglect of gender. This neglect is reflected by social movement theory which has traditionally emphasised the role of class in social movement organisation but ignored its relation to gender (Charles, 2000). Notably, so-called ‘old’ social movements concerned with working class politics tended to focus on and be made up of working class men who had access to the labour market, unlike women at that time (though the gendered nature of the labour movement’s basis is less recognised than its class roots). In tackling this bias, it makes sense that participants tend to focus on issues of gender above class (though of course the two intersect).

Moreover, as I have shown, participants are concerned with wider questions about what it means to be human. It becomes clear that participants perceive neoliberal capitalism to enforce values that are not only in opposition to values of empathy and caring but that actively erode such humanist values. Holloway (2010: 9) asserts that 'humanity (in all its senses) jars increasingly with capitalism' and ties the rejection of capitalist values to 'becoming fully human' (p.7). Like Della Porta (2013), Holloway (2010: 39) emphasises dignity and contends that it is not only the assertion of our own dignity that matters but others' also, rooted in 'mutual recognition and respect'. Therefore, like participants, Holloway (2010) notes that the building of community and solidarity is a key aspect of anti-capitalism, not a by-product of it, and that this emphasis on creating or recovering alternative social relations is central. We have seen that there is an emphasis placed by participants on rediscovering and channelling what it means to be human, with concern for others forming the basis of this. Moreover, this concern with community and the collective is constructed by participants in opposition to the individualistic, selfish attitude that they perceive to characterise neoliberal capitalism.

Participants draw on the example of unionism and the direction in which they perceive it to be heading to demonstrate a perceived wider shift away from collectivism and towards individualism, highlighting its negative effects. Amanda claims that people are no longer engaged in collective organising and action but are only concerned with what they can get for themselves. Likewise, Dermot laments that people now join unions for personal protection rather than to fight as a collective:

Nowadays, look at TUC [Trade Union Council] unions, they're a joke, people join TUC unions as an insurance mechanism, they go 'I might lose my job so I'M going to make sure that I have free representation', that, I mean, the word, the name for it is a Un-i-o-n (drawn out), you're

supposed to unify and you're supposed to all fight, 'cause an injury to one is an injury to all, that's kind of what unionism's all about. You get these people who are only doing it to protect *themselves* and that's, that's tragic.

Dermot stresses how “the whole idea of a *-union-*, it's if we work together and cooperate and fight *together*, we can win”. Likewise, Jared contends that trade unions are important because people have more power as a collective than as individuals. This notion of collective power was raised by many participants with the key point being that there is power in numbers. Here, participants referred to how the more people there are fighting a cause, the more impact they are likely to have and the more likely they are to be listened to. This collective power offers support for activists who “feel really sort of energized by that” (Dana). Amanda speaks about how she would have more courage to do direct action in a group but would not have the confidence to do actions or challenge individuals by herself. Adrian and Lydia speak of how it is easier to go to actions if they are in a group as doing it alone “scares me”. Indeed, Jasper (1997: 82) asserts that empowerment can emerge from ‘collective effervescence’ or solidarity. Collins (1990) draws our attention to the emotional dimension of this collective power, referring to emotions as ‘the glue of solidarity’. Further, Alexander (2006: 53) highlights the role of feeling as well as thinking in political engagement and argues for an analysis of ‘the critical role of solidarity’. Clearly, such collective support and interactions between activists sustain activism by providing the confidence and emotional support needed to maintain involvement.

The social side of activism

Many participants speak of the “loneliness” of not sharing political views with their friends and how it felt good to meet others whom they have “more common ground with”. Leonie says:

It felt and to look around and see all these people, wow, actually this is something that people care about and people think this is wrong. And it makes you feel, sometimes you feel like you are on your own, you are the only one who has noticed this or who is bothered about this, and it makes you feel actually it is not just me.

Likewise, Tony says:

I just don't feel like anyone was taking these issues serious and it was just reassuring to see that there was loads of other people out there that not only had your views but were passionate about them to... go and do something about it. I guess that's why they [Uncut] were really appealing... it wasn't just me out there thinking 'oh my god, I can't believe all of this crap is happening'.

Significantly for Tony, his usual social groups did not contain politically engaged or active individuals and so this shared interest with other activists was regarded highly by him. Certainly, many participants emphasised the strong sense of solidarity that arose from doing activism with people who shared their views. Lydia refers to it as a key sustaining factor that helps her to overcome personal difficulties and attend protests. Moreover, for some participants, their first introduction to activism was through activist friends. Lily got involved "mainly through personal relationships" and says "because I knew them it made it very easy to join". Jared explains "I've become more active due to the people I've got involved with over the last couple of years". Corrigan-Brown (2012: 84) recognises that friends who are existing members of a movement act as a gateway for non-activists' involvement and help to lower the costs of participation.

Those who were involved with UK Uncut spoke of the formation and existence of a "core group" of activists that were particularly active and

who formed close and enduring bonds through their experiences. There is a strong sense of collective identity amongst the core group with participants speaking as “we”, “us” and talking about “*our feelings*”. Amin speaks about how he “felt part of a wider community”. Will even notes “we had 3 arrests in all” despite not personally being arrested or even present at the event. What is particularly striking is how strong and enduring these group bonds were. Joe explains that sharing political beliefs and joint experiences of activism is “quite intimate” and helps friendships to develop. Similarly, Amanda speaks of the special bonds she shares with other activists as a “deeper thing” and Alex asserts that such bonds are “empowering and inspiring”. In fact, Adrian recalls meeting Alex as “almost something spiritual... it was just an understanding that came without words” and describes them as “almost like brothers”. Likewise, Leonie speaks about a particularly difficult time for her:

That year was a horrible, horrible year for me and, probably one of the worst years that I have had [...] and the people that were there for me and kept me going and were like my family, were the people that I met through Uncut. Whereas longer standing friends didn't really get it so much. They [Uncut people] were the people who bolstered me when I was really at my lowest point.

Corrigall-Brown (2012: 84) suggests that social ties can be developed during engagement which help participants deal with the emotional impact of difficult times. Similarly, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 33) emphasise the significance of *caring* for one another; one of their interviewees remarks “the connections we have at that level are incredibly deep”. Here, then, we see the importance of caring for other activists as well as the issues and those who are affected by them. Corrigall-Brown (2012: 102) quotes an interviewee: “it’s like you served in the trenches of a war and you have these war buddies. You have a

common experience that is so intense”. Jasper (1997: 82) speaks of how the bonds of community are essential for sustaining action and Corrigan-Brown (2012: 12) contends that social ties and collective identities affect an individual’s choice to join and remain within a movement. Yet in the case of Notts Uncut, many of the core group did not know each other before their experiences with Uncut. Leonie notes “[w]e met through political action really” and Tony states “the only reason we knew each other was because of UK Uncut”. Many participants met each other through various actions, Joe remarks that “most of the friends that I’ve made have been through those same activities”. Likewise, Mary says “I just meet loads of people. I have developed so many friends in a whole sphere of places over the years that I have been active and I would miss all of that. If I hadn’t engaged in it I wouldn’t have all of those links really”. In fact, Adrian says that meeting new people “who are exciting and speak their mind” can reinvigorate his participation when he is feeling disillusioned or fed up: “it [meeting new activists] sort of ignited a flame again”.

As well as this emotional support and solidarity, participants speak about another sustaining force of the social side — “fun”:

And we made it fun, you know, nobody does anything because it is entirely altruistic. There was a personal gain element in it as well. You know some of those planning sessions were actually me spending weekends with people that I loved very very much and having a jolly good laugh (laughs). (Leonie)

Mary speaks of enjoying activism: “I get really bored if I am not, I just do enjoy doing it. I would do stuff, there is political stuff I don’t really enjoy, but I do it because it is the right thing to do, but I do really enjoy the stuff I do”. For Mary, making political events social is important as she does not have many opportunities to socialise outside of activism. She

claims that this is particularly important for women given the extra time pressures that they have, which I will explore in the next chapter. In fact, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 27) contend that 'it is important not to underestimate the pleasurable dimensions of collective action. If activism was all hard work and drudgery, few people would sustain their involvement in movements for very long, no matter how strongly they supported a given cause', as demonstrated by Leonie's comment above. Likewise, Wettergren (2009: 2-7) contends that 'fun and laughter are also key ingredients' of protest which provide activists with instant rewards and attract others to get involved.

Wettergren (2009: 1) recognises that fun is also a key ingredient of late capitalism but contends that activists 'reject the fun of consumption and offer their own definition of a kind of fun which is real and authentic'. In this respect, fun in protest is perceived to be qualitatively different from consumer 'false fun' and 'reclaiming control over the means of providing pleasure becomes a critical point of resistance' (2009: 5). Indeed, Morris asserts that protest is a legitimate source of fun and should be encouraged in society. He calls himself a "protest-hobbyist, we went out protesting because we enjoyed it" and says protest "is a good usage of time and a healthy, good thing to do". Furthermore, Lasn (1999) contends that 'realizing the full potential of human nature means realizing its natural creativity and propensity to *enjoy* freedom and autonomy' (cited in Wettergren, 2009: 4). It could be said, then, that the fun of protest taps into an aspect of human nature and represents a central feature of what it means to be human by harnessing the creative aspect of human experience. Indeed, Harry emphasises the importance of creativity, contending that it is a central feature of protest because:

When you create a dogmatic power structure that doesn't allow people to express themselves or be creative and then traps that human spirit, it becomes pointless. And if you don't have that democratic free participation

right from the beginning, and that spontaneity and that ability to be spontaneous and creative right from the off then you're inevitably going to create a locked in power structure, if you give up on democracy right from the very beginning, you're not going to come out with democracy at the end. And surely, surely, being spontaneous is the only thing that you can do in a true democracy.

Here, Harry links creativity to ideas of what it means to be human and to the ideal of democracy, suggesting that spontaneity is a way to resist constraining power structures.

Further, Gadamer (1982) speaks about the centrality of 'play' for human development, referring to it as an engrossing activity within which we can 'lose ourselves' and, significantly, become part of the collective. Therefore, play reinforces solidarity and a sense of community as well as providing the opportunity for individuals to transcend both their selves and mundane, daily life. Such ideas are reflected by Bakhtin's (1984) analysis of the carnival where the social order is inverted for a day and a sense of possibility is embodied by the spirit of rebellion, festival, and fun of the carnivalesque. Furthermore, Rifkin (2009) refers to play as central in developing empathy and social behaviour as it encourages interaction between individuals and the ability to imagine the other's position. He (2009: 96) asserts that 'play, then, is far from a trivial pursuit. It is where we stretch our empathic consciousness and learn to become truly human'.

The personal as motivation

So far I have highlighted the emotional basis of motivating and sustaining activism and linked this to participants' emphasis on empathy. I have also drawn attention to the opposition that participants construct between caring for others (including other activists) and being

selfish and individualistic (attitudes which are characteristic of neoliberalism) and how this reflects a concern with a wider shift in society away from collectivism and towards individualism. Participants criticise individuals for focussing only on matters which personally concern them, associating this with an individualistic selfish attitude. Joe contends that people do not care about particular problems “because they don’t encounter [them] in day to day lives”. Likewise, Charlotte speaks of the NHS saying:

I think people just won’t, don’t understand it or won’t understand it until it’s been sold off, until it affects them, until it’s their granddad that’s waiting out for his lift to the hospital and the private minibus company’s 10 hours late, you know?

However, there is another, more positive side to this whereby individuals are motivated to do activism *because* they are personally affected by austerity. Dermot asserts that those who are the most affected by austerity (women and disabled people) “are the most active” as they have a bigger stake in trying to change things and Owain claims that “people are far more likely to take an interest when they have a personal stake in it”. This reinforces Della Porta’s (2015) contention that it is those who are affected by austerity who are protesting against it. In fact, Hazel contends that “necessity drives a lot of activism”. She suggests that there are two types of motivation for activism:

Some people are very altruistic and they come into it from very privileged backgrounds and they feel that they want to make things better for people who don’t have the same privilege, which is nice, sometimes it’s nice but misguided, because they don’t necessarily understand the issues they’re fighting about. But other people come into it because they’re literally skint and they see that they’re

skint and they see that it's not fair, and they want it to be more fair. And also they just want the truth to be known about the reality of living in poverty, you know?

Here, economic concerns about money are combined with normative ideas about justice and how things should be. Significantly, lived experiences of austerity and poverty are crucial for understanding these issues. Mel suggests that she understands austerity because of her personal experiences growing up in the context of austerity and Anna asserts that having everyday lived experiences of an issue is different from having an abstract understanding. Moreover, Hazel suggests that the two types of motivation for activism do not link up:

I don't think there's this level of thought in a lot of activism because the two sides don't link, you've got people who are in activism for basic need and they're just angry and they need stuff and they want to get stuff done, and that's kind of where I'm coming at it from. But then you have other people who maybe have ideas, about language and protest and movements, and their ideas may be very valid but they don't have the empathy to connect with the other people.

It appears, then, that empathy can act as a bridge between those without lived experiences and those who are personally affected by the issues. Beth talks about the importance of being able to "put yourself in the shoes of" others in order to feel compassion and understanding, suggesting the importance of lived experiences. In a similar way, Alex says "I've definitely been in really shit disempowered kind of positions and so I can, not only empathise, but I've actually lived that life". While empathy is central to Alex (he describes activism as "actively wanting to reduce harm" and his reasons for doing so being rooted in "empathy" and "ethics") there is again a sense that lived experience is somehow a more valid form of identifying with people's suffering which gives him the

legitimacy to speak about and act on such issues. This raises questions about issues of representation; who can speak about particular topics, as well as who can legitimately claim the label of 'activist', which I will explore in the next chapter.

Despite this, participants demonstrate that people are not only affected by issues that personally affect them but are affected by witnessing the effects of austerity on those close to them and others. Henry says that he is motivated to do activism against austerity because of seeing the effects that policies such as the bedroom tax have on his mother and others he knows. Several participants speak of being motivated by witnessing the effects of austerity on those they work with. Dana says "when you work in the public sector in the NHS, you see how bad things are for people". Similarly, Mary speaks of "seeing it as it is in those situations" through working at a school and seeing children coming to school not having eaten and without adequate clothing. Indeed, Della Porta (2013: 9) notes that in anti-austerity movements 'the immorality of the system is denounced, often with reference to its concrete effects on everyday life'.

At the same time, participants acknowledge that those who are the most affected by austerity are often preoccupied with the daily struggles of survival, which prevent them from doing activism. Several participants suggest that this daily grind wears people down, forcing them to become accepting of the current situation and resulting in them feeling powerless. Hazel says "So, it is easy to become ground down, and just think oh well, this is the way life is". Likewise, Alison laments that everyone has accepted things as they are and Martin notes that "there is not a great deal of hope that things can get better in the short or the medium term I don't think". Coleman (2016) and Hitchen (2016) suggest that the cumulative effect of austerity in everyday life makes individuals less likely to resist it and more likely to accept it. Significantly, for participants, such feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness are perceived to be the main causes of apathy. Thus, it is not that people do

not care about the issues or are unaware of them, but that they feel powerless and that there is no point in resisting austerity. Indeed, participants remark that the general feeling among the public is “what difference can I make?” Mel notes that a common response she faces at actions is “I see what you mean, but I just don’t know what I could do”. Likewise, Chatterton (2006: 267) recalls responses at protests of “I agree with you but I feel powerless. What can we do?”

Participants’ response to this question is two-fold; firstly, participants emphasise the importance of “doing something rather than nothing” and “doing what you can”, secondly, and interlinked with the first, participants construct activism in terms of individual responsibility and a duty to the collective. Here, participants stress the impact of one’s individual actions on other human beings, as well as on the environment, and appear to reinterpret neoliberal responsabilisation discourses in a positive way to justify and encourage activism. I will now explore this in more depth, as well as drawing out some of the tensions that exist here in preparation for the next chapter where I will examine this ambivalence more closely.

Making a (small) difference and the everyday

Within the context of widespread disillusionment with the current political system and the feelings of disempowerment which arise from this, participants emphasise the importance of “doing something rather than nothing”, and not giving up and accepting the status quo. Though participants acknowledge that attempts to change things may be futile, they contend that “there is no excuse for not doing so” (Dermot). Dana says “Unless I try I can’t say I’ve tried... so I might be whistling in the wind but I’ll just keep whistling”. Likewise, Alison notes “but you have got to fight the fight, haven’t you? Even if you know that you’re going to lose”. While this seems negative, Alison makes the point that “although it might feel like you are arguing with people and it seems pointless I kind of think that it is important to have those arguments and to raise

awareness and that by doing that you are changing things”. Similarly, Amanda speaks of her work rehabilitating male domestic abusers and says how:

With that job I sometimes think oh (sighs), you know, I might work with 200 women, I might only actually properly help maybe 1 or 2 but rather that than none at all. So it’s a bit like that, I’d rather do something than nothing. I’d rather go on a march where at least someone I talk to might think ‘oh right yeah, I understand now the way that they exploit people’ and that kind of stuff rather than like, you know, save the world kind of thing.

Amanda highlights the importance of making a difference, however small that may be, and often in the face of perceived ‘failure’. Furthermore, she contrasts small acts of consciousness-raising with larger “save the world kind of thing[s]”, alluding to different types and levels of action but also recognising, like Alison, that interactions with non-activists count as action. We see here the distinction drawn by participants between activists and non-activists, raising questions about the differences between the two groups as well as the implications of drawing this boundary, which I will explore in the next chapter. Like Amanda, Charlotte speaks of her partner’s work as a Mental Health Nurse as a form of activism: “he helps people, like individual people, and he does things for people, very quietly, so I think that is a way of being active, you know, changing things”. Similarly, Alison and Jared who work in women’s and social services, define their work as activism, provoking debate about how we define activism. Horton and Kraftl (2009) suggest widening the definition to include everyday ‘implicit activism’ such as caring for others and working in community projects. There are two interlinked and central aspects here that reflect participants’ narratives: caring as activism and everyday activism.

We have seen that participants construct their activism in terms of care, referring to “caring”, “empathy”, and “helping” other people. This care involves both caring about austerity and its impacts, as well as caring about the people affected by austerity. Sevenhuijsen (2000: 12) asserts the value of using a broad definition of care as a point of departure for a ‘political vision on the place of care in society’. Further, Himmelweit (2002) draws attention to the ways in which the economy relies not only on paid work but also unpaid services including domestic and community care, a point pertinent to anti-austerity activism. In this vein, feminist theorists have explored an ‘ethic of care’, where private and public care are rooted in a commitment to human inter-dependence that is contrasted to the dominant emphasis of citizenship on independence (which tends to be associated with maleness) (Bubeck, 1995; Lister, 2008). Here we see the centrality of relationships, a theme that is threaded throughout participants’ narratives, and are reminded of the role played by empathy and ethics in providing the motivation for political action. An ethic of care is a way of combining such feelings of empathy for the other with the moral duty to act, resulting in the practical act of providing care for others. However, the gendered nature of care work, with women tending to provide unpaid care, poses problems concerning the burden of responsibility to care being placed on women’s shoulders. This is especially pressing in the context of austerity where in the absence of service provision, women are expected to fill the gap by providing services that were previously provided by the state. Thus, provoking debate about the gendered impact of austerity and its resistance, which I will turn to in the next chapter.

Participants incorporate care into activism and stress the importance of activism at the everyday level. Alison says:

I can help a person that day, so I think that’s important and I think you can fight back in your everyday life like, I don’t know, I really sort of believe in the stuff that Gramsci wrote

about the everyday, like the battleground of common sense.

Similarly, Mel stresses that politics is an everyday, lived phenomenon rather than an abstract concept that is out of individuals' control: "Because everyone has a little thing they can do, the problem is the way the propaganda machine works for politics is 'oh politics is this huge serious thing that happens in the houses of parliament'- bollocks it does!" Alexander (2006: 551) reinforces this, contending that 'rather than an abstract deduction of philosophers, the normative stipulations of society turn out to be the language of the street'. Certainly, for Harry, everyday interactions are a key aspect of what being an activist means:

It [being an activist] means using every single opportunity by every means necessary to instigate, to agitate, to change, and to educate. From anything, from just somebody makes a casual racist remark in the street and you make it obvious you don't like it, someone drops some litter in the street and you make a point of picking it up, so literally from just everyday interaction to like, making sure that the language you use doesn't entail any kind of patriarchal hegemony in it.

Here we see a level of ultra, or perhaps hyper- activism, with "every single opportunity" being used for activism, raising questions about how much individuals are expected to do in order to be considered activists. Clearly, this clashes with the notion of "doing what you can" and this is a key tension which I will elucidate in the next chapter. Similarly, Dermot, Jared, and Adrian speak of challenging people in their daily lives if they encounter someone using sexist or racist language and educating them to do otherwise. Jared says "I think I do things through day to day sort of challenging. Sometimes I'll challenge if I hear people saying racial slurs or sexist slurs or transphobic things". Again we see this notion of

‘educating’ non-activists, with the implication being that activists have special access to a particular type or level of knowledge that needs to be spread, giving the impression of activism as evangelism.

Scott (2012: 8) draws our attention to the quotidian and emphasises the importance of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ or ‘the countless small actions of unknown people’. This sentiment is reflected by Amin who claims that “every day I am making a protest” and participants who speak about subtle acts of resistance which they privately engage in. These range from using their workplace’s time and resources for printing protest materials to deliberately provoking shops. Helen (an active participant in Notts Uncut during its peak) notes that “I used to occasionally stop outside of a Vodafone shop just when I was walking to see if they started pulling down the blinds (laughs)”. Participants clearly derived pleasure from doing and recounting such acts as secret, personal victories against ‘the system’. It seems to be a way for participants to exercise autonomy and feel empowered, demonstrating the importance of listening closely to experiences of quiet, quotidian resistance. Indeed, Scott (2012: 12) notes that:

Quiet, unassuming, quotidian insubordination, because it usually flies below the archival radar, waves no banners, has no officeholders, writes no manifestos, and has no permanent organisation, escapes notice.

Significantly, participants suggest that small acts add up and connect to wider change. Beth says: “I think that there’s a definite correlation there that means that if you can disrupt something kind of in the everyday [...] who’s to say that won’t make [people] think differently?”. Likewise, Adrian suggests that small acts can have a wider impact:

I do sort of like poking at figures of authority with words often. Even just minimal things like sitting on the Council House steps and just sitting there and just telling the

PCSOs where to go really when they try and move you along. Just minor things like that because I think people feed off that as well, just like questioning someone in the street doing something horrible.

Adrian speaks of minor subversions in his everyday life and suggests the importance of demonstrating that authority is challengeable in order to empower people who currently feel powerless. He asserts “I think you put yourself in a position that you know is risky but may have the fallout that other people see that and go oh, that person did it and it’s fine, I’m going to do it”. Similarly, Della Porta (2013) contends that the perceived costs and benefits of protest change when we see others taking a stand, which increases the likelihood of mass mobilisation. Furthermore, Adrian draws on this idea of putting others before oneself, putting himself at risk for the sake of others. In fact, he suggests that there is a level of fear amongst people about “crossing the line” into activism and that people need to realise that the consequences of doing so are not as bad as feared. Again, Adrian suggests that challenging dominant narratives can lead to a more widespread dissent and effect: “if it’s just a few people pick up on that and start questioning it then that can have an effect”.

Indeed, Beth speaks of “the butterfly effect” in terms of the potential for small actions to have significant impact and lead to bigger changes. Crucially, it is about individuals’ actions combining and working together as a collective to produce change. Mel states: “let’s really make a difference, let’s have everybody make tiny small differences and have a bigger society that really works... It takes a village to raise a child; it takes a huge number of people doing many small things to make a revolution”. Similarly, Pickerill and Chatterton (2006: 3) speak of ‘the revolution of the everyday’, contending that ‘autonomy allows a rethinking of the idea of revolution — not about seizing the state’s power but, as Holloway, 2002 argues, “changing the world without taking power”’. Significantly,

Pickerill and Chatterton's conceptualisation of 'autonomy' is collective and about 'making protest part of everyday life, but also making life into workable alternatives for a wider social good' (2006: 9).

Participants emphasise "celebrating small actions counting" within the context of a society which is preoccupied with big changes. Mel notes that "there are small things and it's like people want big changes... you count these big things; you'll learn later to count the small things". Indeed, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 25) assert that we need to 'acknowledge the importance of individual acts in social change'. Likewise, Solnit (2005: 75) contends that 'our acts count, that we are making history all the time'. Solnit (2005) asserts that history is full of small acts that have changed the world in surprising ways and encourages us to move away from a linear notion of history that is preoccupied with cause and effect, instead conceptualising history as 'a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension' (2005: 4). Notably, Solnit uses comparisons to nature, in a similar way that participants use natural imagery to describe Uncut, to imply an inevitability and a sense that this is the natural order of things.

We have seen so far that there is a notion that activism is part of everyday life and something which "everybody" can do. Indeed, Mel says "it all ties back to what can we do as individuals during austerity? [It] is remind ourselves that we are still empowered people who can still do something". Moreover, participants suggest that activism is something which people not only can do but that they *should* do. It is here that we see the notion of activism being a duty to others and the environment.

Activism as (individual) responsibility to the collective

Participants draw on the neoliberal responsabilisation discourse but subvert and reinterpret it in ways that both appeal to the public and undermine the dominant narrative, demonstrating both a hermeneutics

of faith and suspicion (Levitas, 2012). Amanda states that the neoliberal narrative says “you should stand up for yourself, take responsibility” and counters this, saying “we’re not saying people shouldn’t take responsibility, for me that [doing activism] is taking responsibility”. Significantly, Amanda’s use of “we” suggests a collective identity and an activist community that is opposed to neoliberal ideology. This discourse of responsibility is transformed to mean having a duty to stand up for others and against injustice. Joe notes how, for him, activism is a responsibility to others less fortunate than him and speaks of it as “serving society”. Similarly, Hazel quotes Alice Walker, saying: “activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet”. There is a sense of ‘giving something back’, which Mel draws on raising the questions: “What is my gift? What can I give back?” Similarly, Chatterton (2005: 547) discusses ‘autonomous geographies’ as a collective project concerned with ‘an ethic of responsibility and reciprocity’.

Walker’s emphasis on “the planet” reflects many participants’ concern with the environment and animals, which several participants believe should be included within empathetic concerns. Rifkin (2009) reinforces this arguing that the development of an ‘empathic consciousness’ which includes the environment is vital to create sustainable economies and ensure the planet’s future. Several activists commit to veganism because of their empathy for animals and the environment which acts as a key motivation for their activism. However, this is a point of contention for some participants who feel that human beings should be given priority, a viewpoint which vegan activists disparage as “speciesism” and which, we will see, causes tension within the activist community. Despite this, for some participants, concerns about the environment and humans come together to form a more “holistic” activism. Mel speaks of how her activism is concerned with “always looking for where is the hole in the whole”. Likewise, Adrian and Dermot speak of how their activism

connects different issues, rooted in concerns for animal welfare and criticisms of capitalism.

In particular, Mel focuses on consumer choices, choosing to “educate and empower” people to boycott companies that cause harm and to take up a more environmentally sustainable approach. Similarly, Rifkin (2009) suggests that we need to start thinking about the negative impact our consumption lifestyles have on those from less developed countries and, more widely, on the ‘biosphere’ that maintains life on earth. Like Mel, Chatterton (2006: 266) speaks about having conversations with the public that are based on making individual choices rooted in concern for a wider collective:

More difficult conversations concern a wider ethics of responsibility which uses the collective “we” rather than the individual “I”. This means scrutinising our daily actions and our, usually unknowing and invisible, collusion in ways of living that have negative effects on others.

Chatterton stresses responsibility as well as accountability and acknowledges the difficulty in getting people to face up to this. In contrast, Mel suggests that making individual choices is a relatively easy way to start making a difference and to re-empower individuals.

In fact, Scammell (2000: 352) contends that political consumerism constitutes a new form of citizenship; she remarks that ‘it is no longer possible to cut the deck neatly between citizenship and civic duty, on one side, and consumption and self-interest, on the other’. However, this focus on consumer citizenship has been criticised for narrowing understandings of active citizenship and reinforcing capitalism and its values of consumption. Indeed, while consumer politics may contest the status quo, it does so within the frames of reference that are decided upon and normalised by the status quo. Kennelly (2014: 250) notes how ‘even within activist subcultures contesting neoliberalism, we see the

cultural effects of neoliberalism at play, in particular via the belief that young people might “choose” to “change the world” through their individual actions’. Likewise, we have seen how participants draw on neoliberal responsabilisation discourses to justify and encourage activism. Therefore, while actively fighting against neoliberal values, activists also problematically reinforce them, revealing the tensions present here and the difficult reality of resisting such a pervasive force as neoliberal capitalism, which structures our daily lives and which we are all complicit in upholding. Indeed, Hall (1988: 165) demonstrates the difficulty of fully resisting neoliberalism through his analysis of Thatcherism, the first phase of the neoliberal age:

Of course, we’re all one hundred per cent committed. But every now and then — Saturday mornings, perhaps, just before the demonstration — we go to Sainsbury’s and we’re just a tiny bit of a Thatcherite subject.

Hall highlights how neoliberalism is embedded in and entangled with our everyday lives, and even protest activities. In this respect, McGuigan (2016: 23) describes neoliberalism as a ‘structure of feeling’, drawing on Williams, ‘it is inscribed into habitual modes of conduct and routine practices governing everyday life in largely unexamined and unconscious manner [sic]’.

Further, neoliberal capitalism draws on and utilises people’s desire to be ethically responsible, accumulating money by doing so. As Brown (2015: 27) asserts, ‘caring’ has become ‘a market niche’ with ‘social responsibility’ representing little more than ‘the public face and market strategy of many firms today’. Moreover, it is important to remember that ethical consumption choices require both money and knowledge. While Mel attempts to help with the latter, the former is rarely recognised by participants, hinting at the ways in which privilege goes unnoticed in some respects, which I will return to in the next chapter.

Overall, participants suggest that people can do something, and that doing something is better than doing nothing. As Charlotte states, “you do what you can”. Mel asserts “it’s about doing what you can, where you can”, the question to ask is “what can I do as an individual?” Moreover, she (and others) suggest that individuals have a responsibility to make choices that alleviate suffering, as Alex says “to reduce harm”, and that this is rooted in morals, ethics, and empathy. In fact, Lydia contends that “you can’t just do everything straight away, but activism is something that you can do”. While this approach emphasises choices that can be made in the present in people’s daily lives it also reflects the prefigurative politics notion of ‘be the change you want to see in the world’ and demonstrates that ‘change is possible through an accumulation of small changes, providing much-needed hope against a feeling of powerlessness’ (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 738).

However, questions are raised here about what distinguishes those who choose to do activism from those who do not. For Mel, it appears to be a simple case of making the choice to assert control over one’s life. She states “throwing your hands up and wailing and saying you can’t do anything is like oh please, get a life, you know? It’s, well, get your own life”. Yet, if empowering oneself and doing activism was as easy as Mel implies, then the question remains of why more people are not involved in activism against austerity. Furthermore, the emphasis that participants place on educating and empowering others in order to encourage them to do activism reveals the effort required to persuade people to become politically active. This suggests that there needs to be an external influence that helps to change people’s perspectives and actions and therefore that doing activism is perhaps not an isolated individual choice which people come to by themselves. Again, we return to questions about the differences between those who are already activists and those who are not, and the distinction between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’ is reaffirmed.

The idea that activism is a duty reflects a moral and normative stance held by many participants who contend that it is something that everybody *should* do. Furthermore, the notion of having individual responsibility and being able to make choices that can make a difference is attractive in that it shifts away from the idea that individuals are powerless ‘victims’ (echoed in the question “what difference can I make?”) and towards the idea that they have agency and can create change, leading to empowerment and mobilisation. However, this discourse about individual responsibility can also be dangerous as it can lead to individuals feeling guilt, judgement, and being shamed by other activists for not doing ‘enough’, indeed, the question is raised - how much is enough? Hope (2014) identifies the risk of ‘competitive’ activism which, ironically, mirrors capitalist values. Hope contends that, for many, activism has become a sport of ‘one-upmanship’ that is about ‘winning’ where ‘knights roam the landscape impaling as many people as possible on their swords of truth and justice’. Indeed, the responsibility discourse can entice people into a ‘blame game’ which detracts focus from the true ‘culprits’ (i.e. the capitalists at the top) and divides by creating tensions between those at the ‘bottom’ (the ordinary people). Such attitudes and anxieties are evident throughout participants’ narratives, problematising what ‘counts’ as activism and who can claim the title of ‘activist’, which I will explore in the next chapter.

Activism as motivation: Sense of self

Participants’ political engagement is also motivated and sustained by the individual rewards that they receive from doing activism in terms of how activism makes them feel personally. Amanda says “If I can create a caring sharing world just in my little part of the planet then, and support people, support women I work with, support colleagues I work with, then I get a lot back from that”. Amanda defines activism as supporting others and refers to the personal rewards she receives from this which help to sustain her involvement. Similarly, Mel acknowledges that “if

someone helps you, quite often you're helping them, even if it's just helping boost their self-esteem on a bad day". Therefore, there is an individual benefit from helping others which is recognised by participants. As Dermot describes, referring to trade unions: "of course a union is about protecting *your* job if you get in trouble, otherwise what's the point? But you also need to be in there to protect everybody else's jobs". Significantly, there is still a focus on helping other people and on drawing together as a collective to protect the individuals within it; self-interest is not presented as the primary motivation for doing activism.

Throughout participants' narratives there is a careful balancing of the individual and the collective which is evident in the ways participants speak about their motivations for doing activism. Participants emphasise the need to speak out and stand up for others out of empathy but it appears that this is combined with self-interest, though participants rarely admit this. Anna speaks of a poster we had previously seen together:

The poem that I live my life by is outside, the one that [says] 'and then they came for me'. So that was the first thing that I was taught as a child, it's, by the time they come for you it's too late, you have to speak out when they come for everyone else already.

She stresses the notion that "an injury to one is an injury to all" but also demonstrates a concern with the potential (dangerous) consequences of remaining silent — namely, that your turn to be persecuted will come and there will be no one there to protect you. Similarly, Mary and Lily speak of the importance of speaking out and taking a stand because of the dire consequences if they do not:

[my mother] talked about having to have the money on top of the fridge in the jam jar for the doctor and all that sort of stuff, she was in that era pre-NHS, so you are just aware that if

you don't do something then you potentially could go back to those sorts of things. (Mary)

People are taught nowadays to be neutral and to not have an opinion but I do, I have an opinion on racism because it affects me, I have an opinion on disabled policies because it will affect me and if you can't have an opinion on something that directly hurts you, it would lead to a really really dangerous situation where you just become silent and let things take over. (Lily)

Lily refers to the idea that people get involved in issues that personally affect them and links it to the need to speak out. Clearly, there is an element of self-interest in participants' concerns about not doing anything. However, such attitudes are distinct from the individualistic capitalist values that participants reject. Brown and Pickerill (2009: 32) contend that there is an aspect of individualism to forms of 'DIY politics' which emphasise self-reliance and creating alternatives to the current situation but that at the same time 'an ethos of concern for others remains', again highlighting the careful balancing act between individualism and collectivism. Similarly, Munck (2005: 68) suggests that 'the neoliberal rhetoric of "participation" and "self-determination" can be subverted and made to work for a renewed notion and practice of the active citizen'.

Furthermore, participants link the duty to do activism to their sense of self-identity and suggest that activism itself is a motivation. Indeed, Alice Walker proclaims that 'resistance is first of all a matter of principle and a way to live, to make yourself one small republic of unconquered spirit'. Lily calls it her "purpose in life" and Harry says it is "a defining part of my identity". Alison says:

I guess that [activism] motivates me in my life and for some other people that's money. They will probably get a

bit further than I do, but that is what motivates, that is what gets me up in the morning, I suppose.

Alison contrasts activism with neoliberal, capitalist values reflecting the construction of a selfish individualistic attitude versus caring about the collective, though she appears to have internalised part of this narrative that progress is related to monetary gain. Clearly, for many participants, doing activism is in part about how they wish to perceive themselves and how they wish to be perceived by others. Indeed, Jasper (1997: 136) asserts that ‘doing the right thing is a way of communicating, to ourselves, as well as others, what kind of people we are’. In fact, Mel, Owain, and Alison draw attention to the underlying moral basis of doing activism, suggesting that it is “a moral imperative”. To not do activism is seen to be a negative reflection on an individual’s character; Owain states: “I can’t not fight, I wouldn’t be able to look myself in the mirror if I didn’t”. Jasper (1997: 82) acknowledges that ‘bearing witness and “doing what’s right” are satisfying in and of themselves, lending dignity to one’s life even when stated goals are elusive’. We are reminded here of Della Porta’s (2013) comments about anti-austerity activism’s concerns with recognising and reasserting the dignity of human beings. Furthermore, the fact that reaching clearly defined goals is not deemed necessary to experience such rewards reflects ideas of prefigurative politics — that the process is as important as the outcome, or even as Chatterton (2006: 271) contends, ‘the journey is more important than a hoped for utopia’. Similarly, Jasper (1997: 379) asserts that ‘the importance of protestors, I think, lies more in their moral visions than their practical accomplishments. They are more like poets than engineers’.

Certainly, there is a sense that activism has value in itself, regardless of the outcomes, reflecting Solnit’s (2005) assertion that we need to stop thinking in terms of cause and effect. She (2005: 31) contends that ‘activism itself can generate hope *because it already constitutes an alternative* and turns away from the corruption at the centre to face the

wild possibilities and the heroes at the edges or at your side' (my emphasis). Here, though, we see this notion of the activist as an extraordinary person, or a 'hero', which both valorises activists and distinguishes them from non-activists, a distinction which needs to be interrogated.

Notably, despite the difficulties that participants face, a sense of possibility is evident throughout their narratives, and it is here perhaps that we can see another difference between those who do activism and others who feel powerless, or hopeless. Mel quotes the Chinese proverb: "Keep a green tree in your heart and maybe the singing bird will come". Crucially, she emphasises the importance of 'maybe': "it *might* happen, but it also may not. However, wouldn't you feel better at the end of your life having done something? You've got to at least try". Again, we see individuals' sense of self being a motivation for doing activism as well as the high value given to activism. Here, doing activism becomes something to judge your life's 'worthiness' by. Importantly, this element of possibility and uncertainty, rather than leading to doubt or despair, inspires hope. It is this hope that appears to be a key motivating and sustaining force for participants, compelling them to "keep whistling", regardless of the wind. Indeed, Solnit (2005: 5) contends that 'hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope [...] because hope should shove you out the door', emphasising its driving force. Solnit (2005: 29) speaks of 'an entirely different sort of hope: that you possess the power to change the world to some degree or just that the world is going to change again, and uncertainty and instability thereby become grounds for hope'. To be sure, uncertainty is translated by participants into possibility, as Harry states, "if you keep on demanding the impossible, you might just get it".

At the same time, however, anti-austerity activism is rife with ambivalence. There is hope. But there is also struggle and, as Holloway (2010: 71) remarks, 'disillusion and disappointment are never far away'.

Indeed, neoliberal capitalism is all-encompassing and its values seep into every area of social life. As Brown (2015: 35) identifies, neoliberalism governs through ‘soft power [...] as a sophisticated common sense, a reality principle remaking institutions and human beings everywhere it settles, nestles, and gains affirmation’. Therefore, it is difficult to constantly resist and moreover, it is not only an external force but one that is internalised. Participants are anguished over thoughts that they do not do ‘enough’; that they do not live up to particular standards or markers of ‘success’. There is a ‘dark side’ of activism that emerges where individuals are judged by others for the level or type of activism that they do and where such capitalist values of competition infiltrate. Moreover, key questions are raised regarding the ways in which activism is defined and understood, as well as how the identity and role of ‘activist’ is constructed and performed by individuals. As I have alluded to throughout this chapter, there are tensions present regarding the distinction made between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’ and the implications of this, which I will draw out in the following chapter in preparation of exploring this ‘dark side’ and other tensions that are revealed in participants’ narratives. Therefore, it is worth keeping in mind the complex, messy, and ambivalent nature of anti-austerity activism, should we risk falling into hopeless (or, rather, hopeful) romanticism.

Chapter 6: Barriers to Doing Activism and Being Activist

We saw in the previous chapter that participants speak about activism as both a responsibility and rooted in the everyday. A key part of this is the idea that everyone can and should do activism; participants stress “doing what you can”. I have also drawn attention to the tensions present here which this chapter will explore in more detail. In particular, I will explore the distinction made between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’ and how the role and identity of activist is constructed, understood, and performed (or resisted) by participants. There is a difference between doing activism and being an activist (Bobel, 2007), raising the question of what defines some people as activists and others as those who participate in activism. I will investigate this by focussing on who *can* do activism and who *should* be an activist, according to participants, which is where the ‘authentic activist’ identity emerges that will be a key focus of this chapter. I will identify the restrictions placed upon who can do activism by exploring barriers and exclusions to activism, focusing on their gendered dimension. I will then look at the question of who should do activism, or be an activist, according to participants and discuss the idea that activism is a luxury which not everyone can afford. Indeed, the concept of privilege is threaded throughout this chapter. The next chapter will further elaborate on the complex and ambivalent nature of the ‘activist’ identity by exploring the construct of the ‘ideal perfect activist’, which is defined by the type and level of activism that individuals do, as well as the implications of this construct.

(Not) checking your privilege

While participants speak about activism in terms of the everyday and suggest that it is something which anyone can do, they often do not appear aware that there is a certain privilege in being able to do activism. A key example of this in the last chapter is the way in which Harry,

Dermot, Jared, and Adrian speak about challenging people's language and actions in their daily lives as a form of activism. As previously mentioned, however, Amanda, Lily and Lydia muse that they do not feel confident or comfortable making such challenges. In fact, Beth says that she would rather tweet Blackwell's about a sexist display in order to be given distance and anonymity that is not present in face to face interactions, for fear that the man working in the shop may react badly and "punch me in the face or something". Though she laughs when giving this example there is a serious point here — that not all individuals are willing or able to take the risk of challenging people face to face. It is notable that there is a gendered divide between those who feel comfortable challenging strangers in their everyday interactions and those who do not and that this gendered dimension is implicit, a topic which I will explore in this and the next chapter. Moreover, there is an issue here of privilege in terms of the position that an individual comes from and how this may be advantaged in comparison to others.

Privilege is frequently spoken about by activists, with the common phrase "check your privilege" being used by activists to alert others to the need to be self-reflexive about how their position may influence their thoughts, behaviour, and entitlements. Such sentiments are reminiscent of third wave feminists' necessary criticisms of second wave feminists' neglect of race and class (hooks, 2000), and the ways in which these intersect with each other and with gender to produce different experiences of oppression. However, it becomes clear that despite constant references to challenging and acknowledging one's privilege, many activists are not aware of some of their own privileges when it comes to doing activism (as demonstrated above). Moreover, it appears that such third wave feminist ideas have been misappropriated and mutated within activist communities into something which is not only removed from its theoretical and practical ancestry but is actively damaging. Lamon (2016), in a recent blog post that was turned into an

article for *The Independent*, refers to such practices of activists policing one another by telling them to “check your privilege” as part of the ‘toxic culture of the left’ which silences dissenting opinions. She draws attention to the disconnect between many activists’ lives and those who are affected by the issues which these activists claim to be fighting against, remarking that people who are affected by class inequality ‘are not concerned with checking their privilege. No. They are busy trying to survive’. Not only are these activists disconnected from the majority of working class people, but they perpetuate ‘a form of bigotry on its own because it alienates and “otherises” those who do not share their ways of thinking and speaking about the world’. Connected to this, Lamon highlights the judgemental and policing aspects of activist cultures which underlie such concerns about “checking your privilege” and which serve to repel not only non-activists, but those within the activist community who dare to disagree with this dominant view. These are central themes which I will be returning to throughout this chapter and the next, particularly when I explore the ‘dark side’ of activism. However, in her attempt to denounce this ‘toxic culture of the left’, which she associates with certain activists’ focus on language and abstract theory, Lamon rejects other more positive features of activism such as attempts to make spaces safer and adopts a harsh approach that risks dismissing emotions and vulnerability entirely. It is here that her argument falls down, for Lamon’s criticisms of the (perceived to be) overly sensitive jar with her call for complete freedom of speech by shutting down possibilities for emotion, reflecting a traditionally masculine attitude of ‘quit whining and get on with it’. Yet, as we will see throughout this and the next chapter, it is traditional masculine attitudes and behaviours, as well as male activists, which tend to produce much of the toxicity found within the activist community.

Despite these downfalls, Lamon’s (2016) initial points that survival is the top priority for those experiencing inequality and that the activist

community are disconnected from those who are oppressed raise key questions about who can do activism and be an activist. Participants emphasise the importance of doing what you can in everyday life and suggest that activism is something which everyone and anyone can and should do. Yet, at the same time it becomes clear that, actually, not everyone *can* do activism or be an activist. Moreover, it emerges that there are common notions held by participants about who *should* be an activist, which is where we begin to see the emergence of the ‘authentic’ activist identity which I will explore later. First, I will consider in more detail the question of who can do activism and the distinction made by participants between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’.

Who can do activism?

Participants speak about lived experiences as a key motivation for doing activism but also acknowledge that being personally affected by austerity acts as a significant barrier to doing activism. Many participants remark that people are so focused on the daily struggle of survival that they do not have the time or energy to engage with activism, as Jared says, “we’re sort of crushed and inhibited by our need to live”. Hazel says “the most marginalised people don’t have time or the energy ’cause you’re literally struggling how to pay your rent or how to do this that and the other. And a lot of your focus is going on that”. Beth reinforces this saying that while she was always taught empathy growing up (which we have seen is considered to be a key motivation for activism), her parents did not translate their experiences of poverty into “being politically active” because “they were so busy trying to survive, to raise me... I don’t think they had the energy or time”. Similarly, Mary says:

For some of the families, just getting by day to day is all they can think about so where they are going to get their next money from to put in the electric meter, that is their priority and they don’t really engage at any level with what is happening and why the government are doing what they are

doing, so for them I think they just see it as being a further attack on them and the things that they have to achieve with very limited resources becomes harder day by day.

Here we see the notion of austerity being an 'attack' on the poorest, as well as the idea that the most affected are not in a position to engage politically. In fact, Hazel states:

So while people can't pay rent, or buy food, that [money] will be their primary concern. So it's in the interests of privileged people and the government to reduce benefits and put a cap on it and have people living in a constant state of fear 'cause they're less likely to engage with activism and try to change the system. 'Cause they're too busy focusing on keeping a roof over their heads and buying food for themselves and the children. Once people have that basic level of need sorted, then they can go on to further things... Maslow's hierarchy of needs, you know? And this is it, you have shelter, food, and further up you're going to get to things like fulfilment and people who are struggling at the bottom are never going to get to be self-fulfilled and learning for learning's sake or furthering their own souls, because they're constantly fighting for the money and the housing and the food.

Hazel's comment about fear draws our attention to the way that austerity and the threat of it are affectively lived by individuals. Hitchen (2016: 103) suggests that austerity is 'a series of atmospheres that envelop and condition everyday moments and spaces'. Visceral experiences including the anxiety of struggling to find money for food or receiving a sanction letter that cuts your benefits:

make austerity affectively present as they [experiences] become expressed through the feelings and actions of living beings. Bodies, therefore, are an important medium through

which austerity erupts from ‘background noise’ into the fore (Hitchen, 2016: 104).

Moreover, austerity is often felt as a presence of absence - absence of money, of services, of confidence (Hitchen, 2016: 113). Notably, the responsibility to budget is often placed on women, reflecting another gendered dimension of austerity (Coleman, 2016).

Like Hazel, several participants refer to “the hierarchy of needs” including Alison who says:

I don’t know if those people [who are affected by austerity] always will organise because they are too busy worrying about what they are going to eat and it is all that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs isn’t it? If you are like me and you are kind of comfortable, knowing where you are going to get your food from next week, then you have got time to think about other things, but if you are a single mum on benefits and they keep on cutting you all the time, more and more sanctions all the time, then you are generally worried about how you are going to pay the bills. You are not going to be out there organising against it, are you [...] Because they have got more immediate concerns and they are not politicised a lot of the time and they are not educated a lot of the time so they don’t look at things in the same way.

Alison suggests that while those who are most affected by austerity are too busy focusing on survival, there is an additional problem in that they are not political. She explains: “I guess that the people that I work with in terms of service users are not very political at all, but they are hugely affected by austerity. But they probably wouldn’t even think about it”. In contrast, Hazel argues that “need is political” and draws on the idea that politics is rooted in everyday life. Similarly, Hitchen (2016: 114) suggests that retreating into the day-to-day reflects a desire to ‘get on with life’ in

response to 'the affective force of the uncertain, threatening future'. Helen makes the point that individuals affected by austerity have been protesting against it, but that changes in individuals' circumstances make it difficult to sustain this resistance:

The people that they're attacking are the same people that are fighting back against them so you might have been involved in 2010 but since then you might have had care or transport withdrawn from your kid with autism, you might be under the risk of redundancy at work so putting in extra time there, all sorts of things have changed in the way that those particular people have been attacked which then means that they're less likely to have the confidence and the security and the time and the energy to be involved.

Indeed, Hitchen (2016: 113) remarks that:

The affective presence of austerity in everyday life can generate subtle differences in the body, or 'micro-cracks' that mark a threshold of lower resistance [...] as the affective presence of austerity becomes greater and a more intrusive part of individuals' lives, these 'micro-cracks' in the body accumulate; eventually, they can accumulate so much that they surpass bodily thresholds and transform capabilities to act.

Thus, the multiple and continual affective experiences of austerity 'can change the body's disposition to austerity, and may make individuals less willing to contest, and instead accept austerity itself' (Hitchen, 2016: 117). Those who are the most affected by austerity are often so fatigued by these 'micro-cracks' that they are paralysed from acting against austerity, 'meaning that individuals' everyday lives become consumed with trying to stay afloat' (Hitchen, 2016: 117). In this way, austerity's effects are 'affectively disempowering' (Ibid).

In response, Martin draws on the idea of “doing what you can” acknowledging that whilst people’s focus “rightly is on the day to day getting by, making sure that they have got enough money, enough food, the rent is paid, the kids are clean and fed and off to school”, at the same time it is important to develop “a dialogue” with people affected by austerity, otherwise “you can’t achieve very much”. He suggests that there needs to be a great number of people involved in activism against austerity, including those who are most affected, but that this should be done according to what each individual is capable of doing:

And people can take part to a lesser and greater extent, there might be people who you know could only spare an hour a week or half an hour a week doing something, but I think if enough people thought ‘here is something that I could get involved with’ and felt a part of it, whether they were actively doing a great deal towards it or not then that in a sense would be enough, because their thinking would have changed, not necessarily what they practically and actively do and it might take just one thing.

Martin draws our attention back to the affective dimension by suggesting that it is important for people to feel that they belong to a movement. He also highlights the importance of consciousness-raising, suggesting that activism is about changing not only people’s actions but their thinking too, as I showed in the last chapter. This not only problematises how we define and understand activism, but raises questions about the role activists and social movements play in relation to ‘non-activists’ and those who are affected by the issues that are being protested about.

Participants’ narratives reveal an underlying assumption that activists have special access to the ‘truth’, which others do not, and that the role of social movements is therefore to bring this truth to the public. In a similar way, Alexander (2006) and Melucci (1996: 1) contend that social

movements are key vehicles of social change which ‘force power out into the open and give it a shape and a face’. This is because ‘power operates through the languages and codes which organize the flow of information; therefore, social movements must interrupt these dominant languages to exercise power’ (Melucci, 1996: 9). Tony reinforces this, contending that UK Uncut are “representing these issues that are going untold and that no one’s doing anything about”, saying Uncut “breaks society’s narrative” by highlighting injustices and revealing the ‘truth’. This underlying assumption that UK Uncut has access to “the right information”, and has the responsibility to spread this, draws on evangelism discourses and invokes images of removing the scales from the eyes of the masses, implying that activists are more ‘enlightened’ than others. Indeed, participants speak about the need to educate “ordinary people” about the ideological nature of the public spending cuts, unmasking the government’s “blatant lie” by bringing the issue “out into the open” and into the “public consciousness”. Leonie states:

But the whole point of it really, right at the very heart of it I couldn’t actually give two hoots whether or not Vodafone pay their tax, that is kind of irrelevant to me, the whole point of it was to say look, we are being told that these cuts are necessary, but actually they are not... that these are totally ideological cuts.

Similarly, Tony argues that:

If people don’t have this understanding or the ability to understand this or... or are not getting told the right information to be able to make these decisions then, they’re the people you’re fighting for the most, I think. Who is representing these people and telling their story? No-one. So, I think that’s where UK Uncut comes in.

Tony raises issues of representation regarding who can and who should speak for disadvantaged groups in society, which I will return to later, as well as that these groups do not have a voice in the public sphere. Therefore, Tony perceives social movements to act as a bridge between those who are disenfranchised, the public, and those in power. Similarly, Scott (2012: 20) contends that radical social movements are ‘the transmission belt between an unruly public and rule-making elites’. However, by positioning themselves as more knowledgeable than “ordinary people”, a clear distinction is made between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’, with the former being in a privileged position. Joe suggests, though, that he can use his privilege to push oppressed groups’ desires and needs into the public sphere and thus help to empower those who currently lack a voice in politics:

As I speak from a position of privilege I don’t really have the right to dictate how people from less privileged backgrounds should live. But I want to... I want to extend the power to, in order for them to speak out, in order for them to have a say, where, given that that right is currently concentrated in the upper echelons of society.

We return, then, to the issue of privilege and the question of who can do activism. There appears to be a tension between the need for activism to be focused on and led by those who are the most affected and the daily reality of living with the effects of austerity preventing people from getting involved in activism. Indeed, participants often speak of the “time” and “energy” involved in doing activism, suggesting that such costs act as a barrier to activism. Problematically, it is usually the most vulnerable and disadvantaged who cannot afford such costs and who are therefore excluded from activism.

Costs of activism

Hazel notes that the financial costs of doing activism prevent working class people from being involved; when speaking about the national Women's Assembly meeting, she comments, "it was expensive, it was in London. So, same situation really, even people who are on the left and supposedly against austerity and speaking for working class people exclude working class people by their choice of location and their price". Similarly, Lydia and Lily speak of practicalities which prevent them from doing activism because of "the issue of travelling". Here accessibility is reduced because many individuals do not have a car and cannot afford to travel to protests, Tony acknowledges:

[the cost] does obviously limit the people, you might not afford £10 to go to London to go on a demo. I used to spend an absolute fortune going to London and back... no way could people do that!

Likewise, James recognises the time costs of activism which not all individuals can afford:

Sunday afternoon for me or one of the others, that's a Sunday afternoon, it is not really anything. But to a lot of people that might be their only day off, their only chance to relax, they might be working, you know?

However, there is a further barrier here for participants who have health conditions and disabilities which make it difficult to attend protests and meetings. Both Lily and Lydia struggle with crowds because of their health conditions and find attending protests challenging. Lydia notes how she can only go "if I am feeling well enough, up to it, and if I'm able to do it". Similarly, Adrian remarks that "I find it very tough to go to places where there's people" and Martin speaks of how his partner's health condition means "she gets very tired a lot of the time, so she is physically not able to do a great deal". Likewise, Mel is unable to attend

events without spending money on an accessible taxi and the use of a rollator (a mobility walker), thus increasing the costs of activism and making many protests inaccessible. When making the decision to attend events (if they are accessible) these participants have to consider the recovery time needed afterwards and the impact of activism on their health. Mel draws on 'spoon theory' to illustrate this, describing how when one has a chronic health condition, it is like having a finite number of spoons each day, where 'spoons' represent a person's energy. Therefore, individuals have to carefully consider how to use their 'spoons' and what actions are likely to require time for recovery afterwards. Lily remarks "a lot of disabled students find it difficult, either because of their illness or because there are accessibility issues to do the kinds of things that activism expects you to do". We begin to see the notion that activism requires (or "expects") certain activities, implying that if an individual cannot do these, they cannot be an activist. I will explore the distinction made between different types of activism, how they are organised hierarchically, and the implications of this for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the next chapter. The key point here is that the typical types of protests and meetings that anti-austerity activism involves are often inaccessible to those with health conditions and disabilities, which is especially problematic given that these groups are disproportionately affected by the public spending cuts.

Moreover, the experience of participants with disabilities alerts us to the problem that those who are the most affected also face bigger costs and risks when it comes to doing activism. Being personally affected by an issue makes it impossible to escape or take an (often needed) break from it, meaning activism becomes all-encompassing. Anna demonstrates this:

It's pricier. So I think it takes a greater toll on your wellbeing because you can't remove yourself from it. If you feel disillusioned, you feel disillusioned with yourself and the

possibility for your life to be a better life. You can't just say 'oh let them deal with their issues, I'll just take a break for now'.

Similarly, Lily notes "it just gets like, it's all around, you know? It's really hard to turn off to". Indeed, Anna suggests that people with disabilities are active in fighting austerity "because it's about themselves" but acknowledges that this personal attachment makes it a "painful fight". It appears then that the costs of activism are felt more acutely by those who are the most affected by the issues. We have seen this is the case for people with disabilities, it emerges that similarly, though the cuts disproportionately affect women, gendered barriers and exclusions to activism exist also. Of course, disability and gender intersect, heightening the impact of the costs and barriers that exist here.

Gendered exclusions and barriers to activism

In contrast to claims that gendered structural availability barriers are disappearing (Dodson, 2015), participants contend that women's particular "time burden" impacts on their ability to participate politically. Beth summarises, remarking "women are busy, they're so busy [...] women's time is precious, more so than men's, because they still have to take on this burden of like, housework, or childcare, other care". Beth draws our attention to the widespread notion that "women have more pressures on their time" because of their "caring burden" where Mary explains that "there is still an expectation that women are the people who look after the kids [...] caring for elderly parents. They are seen as the people that do that caring role and are at home". Mary highlights the persistence of traditional public/private boundaries, with women being expected to retain responsibility for the private sphere, caring for the children.

In fact, Alison contends that having to combine employment, childcare responsibilities, and other time pressures is the "nature of being a woman", reinforcing the 'double burden' theory (Kremer, 2007).

Crucially, local anti-austerity groups neglect to take this into account; as Hazel asserts “ultimately they exclude women, because they have the meetings in the evening when you’ve got to put your kids to bed”. Likewise, Charles (1993: 71) draws attention to how trade unions’ operation at a local level makes it difficult for women to participate, by holding meetings in the evenings or at weekends and providing no crèche facilities. Indeed, Phillips (1991: 21) contends that: ‘[i]n societies where the division of labour is ordered by sex (that is, every society we know), time becomes a crucial constraint on women and meetings an additional burden’. Charlotte demonstrates this, speaking of a postcard “that said ‘I wanted to change the world but I couldn’t find a babysitter’ and I think I feel a bit like that at the moment”. Similarly, Beth says:

There is not really any sphere of public life that isn’t gendered. So even when you have well-meaning people maybe meeting under a Marxist banner to oppose cuts to the NHS or whatever it might be, they are usually still typically run by men and you need to have people involved that go ‘hang on, if we have this meeting at this time on a Sunday evening, then these women won’t be able to come’.

Beth draws our attention to the key point that activism tends to be dominated by men and that because of this, women’s concerns are forgotten which leads to gendered exclusions from activism. In fact, Charles (1993: 75) suggests that when such barriers to participation are removed (i.e. by holding meetings during work hours in the case of trade unions), women attend as much as men do.

Participants highlight gendered exclusions within anti-austerity campaigns, drawing attention to their lack of intersectionality and omission of women’s issues. There are two problems here; firstly, white working class men tend to dominate activist campaigns, and secondly, there is a preoccupation with class to the neglect of intersecting issues

such as gender, race, and disability. We can perhaps draw on Brown's (1999) discussion of 'left melancholy' to explain these problems. Brown (1999: 20) invokes Walter Benjamin's idea of 'the revolutionary hack who is, finally, attached more to a particular political analysis or ideal — even to the failure of that ideal — than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present'. She argues that many on the left are in a state of melancholy, unable to overcome the loss of certain left ideas and to adapt to the current state of events in the world. Notably, this left melancholy is manifested as a rejection of cultural or identity politics which are perceived to 'not only elide the fundamental structure of modernity, capitalism, and its fundamental formation, class, but fragment left political energies and interests such that coalition building is impossible' (1999: 23). Combined with postmodernism that throws into question the possibility of Truth and objective grounds for left norms, this results in the continuance of an attachment to what is perceived to have been lost or, 'left melancholy'. Crucially, the consequence of this is the failure to 'apprehend the character of the age and to develop a political critique and a moral-political vision appropriate to this character' (Hall, cited in Brown, 1999: 19). As Brown (1999: 24) asserts, this 'failure results, as well as from a particular intellectual straitjacket — an insistence on a materialism that refuses the importance of the subject and the subjective'. This left melancholy, then, can help to explain why some organisations ignore intersecting issues such as gender (which are seen as a threat to left traditionalism), and focus on class instead.

Indeed, rather than acknowledging and paying attention to the ways in which struggles "interlock", these dominant activists rank struggles in a hierarchy. Dermot explains:

So, the oppressions interlock, our personalities interlock, so the point of intersectionality is that *all* struggles need to address *all* these issues... because if you don't acknowledge that, you end up with trying to combat one form of

oppression by advancing a different form of oppression, so you get a lot of, anti-capitalist people who are really really sexist without realising it and who are setting back the women's struggle because they don't acknowledge the fact that they're linked struggles.

Dermot draws on literature concerning 'intersectionality' (hooks, 2000), a term that was introduced in the 1980s to draw attention to how gender and race interact to form particular experiences of oppression. Initially, intersectionality was concerned with making black women's experiences visible. Emphasis was placed on the intersection of race and gender, which was often ignored by a predominantly white feminism. Further, first wave feminism was criticised for ignoring class differences and how these intersect with race and gender (for a more detailed discussion of these debates see Charles, 1996). The concerns of 'getting out of the home' are considered to be middle class, with this experience being portrayed as representative of all women, thus neglecting working class women who did work, as well as how the home was often a haven for black women facing racism in society, rather than a place of confinement (as it has traditionally been conceptualised within feminist literature). Therefore, intersectionality is useful for thinking about how multiple differences interact to produce different experiences of oppression, including race, class, disability, gender, and sexuality.

While I have attempted to consider the places at which gender and class intersect, there is an obvious absence of race within this study. This reflects the lack of racial diversity within local anti-austerity activism — only 3 of my participants identify as BME. Participants recognised this lack within their movements and attempted to increase diversity, with little success, raising questions about the invisibility of BME individuals within anti-austerity activism. Similar to the neglect of gender within local anti-austerity campaigns, race has been forgotten despite the fact that ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by the public

spending cuts. This requires further research and is not the focus of this thesis (see Sandhu, K., Stephenson, M. and Harrison, J., 2013 for analysis of the local implications of austerity for BME women). Certainly, while intersectionality is important, it is difficult to fully incorporate within such a limited study that by definition has to focus on particular aspects of experience. Therefore, the key concern in this thesis is with the gendered dimension of anti-austerity activism and the points at which this intersects with class.

Within the context of austerity, class is clearly an important element to consider, however, as I have previously outlined, many participants have an ambivalent relationship with class, which reveals itself to be a complex topic. Half of my participants identify as working class, reinforcing the underlying class dimension of austerity, while a further 8 had been raised in working class families but were now considered to be middle class through education, occupation, or marriage. Regardless of their current class status, these participants still identified with their working class roots as a basis for understanding the impacts of austerity, as we will see later. However, though being working class was central to some participants' identities, the context of increased insecurity and the related changing definitions of class have resulted in participants conceiving of class as problematic. Further, it may be the case that because of the dominance of class to the neglect of gender in the People's Assembly, class is strategically minimised as an issue in order to move gender to the fore, and specifically, women's voices. Of course, it is not a case of one or the other (gender or class) as the two intersect, indeed Charles (2000) contends that both class and gender can be understood as traditional social cleavages, though the latter has been paid less attention. However, participants were keen not to let class overshadow other aspects of experience, which Charles (2000) identifies can be the case when class acts as a dominant social cleavage and thus prevents

other conceptualisations of movements and participants (such as gender) from emerging.

Furthermore, there has traditionally been an association between working class politics and masculinity because of the ways in which men tended to dominate earlier, so-called 'old' social movements such as the labour movement, due to their access to the labour market, which women did not have at the time, combined with traditional gendered structural availability barriers which have prevented women from participating in the political sphere. Therefore, in an attempt to move away from this, women participants emphasise the need for anti-austerity activism to focus on women's gendered experiences of austerity over classed ones. Plus, as I outlined in chapter 5, participants are aware of the lack of popular support for class discourses and so, to gain such support, deliberately did not construct their arguments solely in class terms.

Reflecting the persistence of traditional links between working class politics and masculinity, several other participants criticise anti-austerity activism's focus on white men's class struggle. Hazel, a working class single mother, chooses to distance herself from these campaigns because of the ways male privilege dominates and goes unchallenged. She asserts that while women lead many campaigns they often do not get support or credit for doing so, reinforcing research that demonstrates men's privilege and visibility in social movements, to the neglect of women's contributions (McAdam, 1992; Thorne, 1975; Jacobsson and Lindblom, 2012). Bobel (2007: 156) remarks that 'there is often a conventional division of labour in social movement communities (e.g. women behind the scenes/men in front of the cameras), a split that obscures women activist's contributions'. Likewise, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 31) contend that 'there is a lingering machismo within autonomous activism which persists in ignoring how the behind the scenes "emotional work" of activism is often left to women'. Notably, these divides reflect gendered

divides in the type and status of paid work which women do, compared to men. As Charles (1993: 57) identifies:

As well as being clearly demarcated, men's and women's work is valued differently; men's is consistently more highly valued than women's and is regarded as requiring a level of skill which most 'women's work' does not.

While participants did not find that they were assigned gendered roles, they did remark on the prestige given to men compared to the visibility afforded to women. It appears that traditional notions of the public sphere being a male and masculine domain, and the related gendered divides in the workplace, are carried over into alternative political spaces. Further, attitudes and behaviours within these spaces reflect ideas of women being seen as a 'liability' to politics, demonstrated by the treatment of women politicians within party politics (Ross, 2011). Therefore, while these movements attempt to establish themselves as different to party politics, the same gender inequalities that are present in party politics persist in this alternative space, suggesting deeply embedded gender structures and divides.

For several participants this reflects a wider societal lack of concern with women's issues. Alison says how "stuff like raising kids, so that would be seen as something that women do and I would see that as everyone's business and I think because it is a female role it is kind of not seen as very important". Likewise, Charles (1993: 76) notes that 'women's issues' were not given attention or deemed important by trade unions whose male delegates considered issues such as childcare to be individual problems for women to solve outside of work. Instead, Alison asserts that "the things that happen to women personally are something that politics should be concerned with", drawing on the notion that 'the personal is political'. For Alison, the way to increase the profile of traditionally women's concerns such as childcare is:

If dads did that role more then it would be given a higher status and so that, it is like with anything, so women's work, stuff like caring work or whatever, it's normally women that do that, but if more men did that then you know the status would rise of that kind of work.

Here, then, we see the need to reconceptualise care by degendering unpaid caring roles within the family, reinforcing Kremer's (2007: 38) suggestion that valuing care in its own right degenders it, resulting in men and women being freer to make choices about their caring roles. In this vein, Fraser (1994) proposes the 'universal caregiver' model where men take on care and paid work, degendering care-giving and sharing the care burden. Especially relevant here is the ways in which such a model encourages the notion of 'universal citizenship' where wider community and public forms of care are also degendered and shared equally between men and women. However, Alison's solution gives the power to men, reinforcing the current dynamic rather than attempting to challenge this and change the position and power of women. Though Kremer (2007: 38) contends that 'when men perform a specific task, its status will increase', there is the risk that rather than redefining care, men who take on caring roles will instead be perceived as feminine and the gendered nature of care will be further reinforced, along with damaging connotations of femininity and masculinity.

Significantly, women's additional time constraints and caring responsibilities are not only a barrier to *doing* activism but to *being* an activist. Here, we start to see the emergence of the 'ideal perfect' activist identity; an individual who is committed to their cause and tirelessly works for it. This conceptualisation is problematic for several reasons, which I will discuss in depth in the next chapter, presently, the key point is that such 'lofty standards' of what being an activist means excludes those who do not have the time to commit to activism around the clock. As Bobel (2007: 156) asks:

Who can afford to devote nearly every waking hour to their chosen cause? And while this mythic activist is off doing the good work, who, after all, is caring for the children, preparing meals, washing laundry, paying the bills?

Critically, more often than not, it is women who care for the children and maintain the household, revealing the gendered nature of the 'ideal perfect' activist. Again, we are reminded of the continuing presence of structural availability barriers which prevent women from participating politically. Moreover, we start to become aware of implicit and often invisible gendered barriers and exclusions to doing activism and being an activist.

While the ideal perfect activist identity is perceived to be abstract and universal, it seems that, like traditional conceptualisations of the universal citizen, it is actually male. Coleman and Bassi (2011: 216) draw attention to how anarchist movements' emphasis on 'DIY politics' and individual agency 'conceals a very specific subject and a specific body: the white, male able-body'. Similarly, Acker (1990: 146) contends that organisations and ideas of the abstract 'job' mask gender by using a gender-neutral discourse and obscuring the embodied nature of work:

Women are the 'marked' and visible case of gender. Thus gender is obvious in situations where women and femininity are present but invisible (and yet still important) when men and masculinity predominate. The fact that men are 'unmarked' makes movements associated with masculinity appear to be ungendered like most organisations.

The obscured 'masculine' elements of the activist identity is a topic that I will return to in the next chapter, significantly, while gendered barriers and exclusions, as well as barriers specific to people with disabilities, are referred to by participants, the gendered nature of the ideal perfect activist is not recognised. Furthermore, Coleman and Bassi's (2011)

allusion to the ableism at play in constructing the ideal activist identity is particularly relevant within the case of anti-austerity activism where many of the public spending cuts and resistance to them concern people with disabilities. The implication is that the male able body is the ideal, and 'normal', body whereas the female body is lacking and less 'able' than the male. Thus, it is important to look closely at the implicit ways that activism and the activist identity are gendered.

Although participants do not recognise the gendered dimension of the ideal activist, they do highlight other implicit ways in which activism is gendered, classed, and influenced by subtle forms of oppression. Helen notes:

You say 'everyone come to the planning meeting, we'll all contribute', but people's confidence in how to contribute, people's ideas aren't always, either they're not seen in the same way by other people or they simply just don't have the confidence to contribute their ideas or the space to do it, where it might take a lot more time to develop. And that's the thing with people who were working with limited time, the times I've seen that kind of horizontal thing work really well is in things like occupations, where you've got all the time in the world because everyone's just sat around, so you can have a 2 hour meeting every day and gain consensus. Whereas if you're looking at people who are working, campaigning alongside other things, it's the four people who have got the time and the energy who actually end up directing what goes on.

Here we see the issue that even if people can and do attend meetings, 'informal impediments' (Fraser, 1992: 119) exist that prevent people from participating in discussion. Fraser (1992: 126) contends that 'participation means being able to speak in one's own voice', which is not possible when classed and gendered modes of communication are discredited or

ignored. Jared demonstrates awareness of this, asserting that people need to “feel safe enough to have their voice and safe enough to attend there. ‘Cause if there’s not then you’re preventing a lot of people really taking an active role if they wish to in the movement”. Therefore, even when initial access barriers are overcome, further barriers remain that can prevent people from fully participating. Indeed, participants draw attention to a general atmosphere of “aggressive machismo” in activist circles which makes spaces feel unsafe for women to participate. Anna notes how in mixed gender groups “very often the men have [a] very aggressive argumentative style of arguing and they haven’t got rid of all their patriarchal tendencies to speak over you and to shout you down and patronise you”.

Furthermore, Helen’s comment draws attention to the ‘paradox of participatory democracy’, where participatory intentions lead to greater exclusion as only certain people are able to participate fully (Phillips, 1991: 162). As participants have highlighted, activism requires time; indeed, Walzer (1968) observes that if individuals were truly ‘active citizens’, there would be little time left in their lives for much else. As Oscar Wilde reportedly exclaimed, ‘the trouble with socialism is that it takes too many evenings’. Although women are more susceptible to the time costs of activism, it is worth remembering that this affects all activists. Many participants speak about how other commitments prevented them from being more active. Adrian says “the daily rigmarole gets in the way”, Martin and Dana contend that “people are busy!” and Mary suggests that “the difficulty always is that the people that are doing those sorts of things [activism] are generally very busy people”. Beth remarks “I’m in a different position to Georgie or Hazel [other activists] because I work full time, and I’m also trying to finish a PhD so I’m not allowed to take an afternoon off on a Thursday to go and attend these meetings”. Here we start to see how individuals compare their own activity to others, a central theme which will return in the next chapter.

Further, Phillips (1991: 162) draws attention to the negative emotional effects of setting participatory requirements too high: 'the resulting turmoil of guilt and accusation and resentment can drive people away from politics altogether', thus creating the opposite outcome to that intended.

Helen demonstrates another implicit gendered barrier to doing activism – the emotional and psychological constraints she felt as a carer for her terminally ill mother:

So I started taking a lot of caring responsibilities and I think that that makes a huge difference to the way that you interact with the public sphere. Not just because of time restraints, because obviously they exist, but also because of your level of confidence [...] feeling like you're socially excluded in some way, you don't have an identity that's formed by your work, makes it more difficult I think to have the confidence to campaign externally. So, people would come by and shout at you 'get a job, don't do this', and you would be able to say 'actually, I am contributing to society, I have a job which is a valuable public sector job, I feel like I'm doing something really valuable for society'. And although I don't hold views that say unemployed people aren't contributing towards society, you can't help but be affected by that kind of discourse around you in terms of your levels of, sort of self-esteem.

Helen reminds us of the cumulative effect of such 'micro-cracks' that are affectively experienced (Hitchen, 2016: 117). She also draws our attention to the way in which unpaid care is not recognised as legitimate 'work' or as contributing to wider society, reminding us of Lister's (1997) contention that citizenship is still largely defined around paid work. This negative portrayal of unpaid care and its relationship (or lack of) to

citizenship is evident in the way that Helen's role as carer made her feel unable to participate in the public sphere. Helen's experience demonstrates the tension between private and public caring roles, and again raises questions about who can be an activist. Significantly, though caring is described as central to activism and participants' motivations to do activism, private caring roles (such as mother) and activist roles conflict with each other, with the implication being that women can only truly succeed at mastering one of these roles. Leonie demonstrates this, speaking about how she is perceived to be a "dreadful mother" because she is an active activist. Here, general perceptions of motherhood, and what it means to be a 'good mother', impact negatively on women's ability to participate in activism.

At the same time, other participants confirm the 'motherhood effect', where being a mother encourages political participation. Several participants speak about feeling an emotional and moral responsibility as mothers to "create a better future for our children" as well as to ensure that they "grow up in a society that has the services that people need". Rather than care just being the motivation for activism, as we saw in the previous chapter concerning empathy, here we see activism itself as a form of caring, reflecting a feminist 'ethic of care' and ideas of 'universal citizenship' (Fraser, 1994). Furthermore, the notion that *as mothers* these women harness a specific knowledge and understanding of activism, demonstrates a feminist standpoint of women having a distinctive perspective that is not only different to others, but privileged. Here, women's experiences differ structurally from men's because of the type of work that they do, notably reproductive labour, which involves all of the activities that help to sustain and reproduce individuals, or citizens. In fact, Rose (1983: 83-84) suggests that women's reproductive work is distinctive because it is a 'labour of love'. Moreover, women's dual position as central and marginal within social relations affords them a

privileged viewpoint from which 'relations which are invisible from the dominant position become visible' (Tanesini, 1999: 142).

The obvious critique of feminist standpoint theory is that it assumes the existence of a female essence that is sufficiently binding to constitute a shared perspective, regardless of other differences. It therefore reinforces the perceived gender differences upon which women's exclusion from politics has traditionally been based and neglects differences other than gender. Moreover, by suggesting that caring work is an inherently female activity, it reinforces the gendered divide that exists in this area and undermines arguments to degender care. Despite this, we will see throughout the rest of this chapter that women participants often demonstrate a feminist standpoint. Thus, they attempt to subvert gendered exclusions and barriers by reinterpreting gender in positive ways.

Notably, the one occasion where Notts People's Assembly explicitly addressed the gendered impacts of austerity was when they supported the Jarrow Mother's March for the NHS and held a women-only platform of speakers for the rally. While the March was a positive women-led initiative, the cynic could note that supporting it is a fairly easy way for the People's Assembly to present an image that shows them to be concerned with and addressing women's issues despite evidence of gendered exclusions. It appears that traditional tropes of femininity and gender (such as mothers protecting their children) are strategically used, whereas more complex and subtle everyday issues concerning gender are obscured and ignored. Therefore, while such tactics can enable women to do activism, they can also be damaging by reinforcing traditional gendered roles and constraining the ways that women can participate politically. Indeed, critics of the 'motherist frame' contend that it uses dichotomous roles of men and women which 'limits the cultural frames of resistance available to movement participants' (Kuumba, 2001: 19).

Women participants' experiences as carers and activists demonstrate the tensions involved in negotiating these two identities and provokes debate about how the identity of activist could be redefined in terms of care, especially given the emphasis that participants place on empathy as the foundation of activism. Lampert (2005: 170) uses the term 'social activism' to highlight activism's grounding in caring about others and speaks of 'radical compassion' as a driving force for individuals to act for social change. Reflecting a feminist standpoint, Hazel suggests that women are actually better activists because they "care more than men". Likewise, Rose (1983) suggests that women not only have different experiences, but different cognitive ways of understanding and knowing the world. Here, women's caring labour 'endows them with an affective way of knowing' (Tanesini, 1999: 143). Culley (2003: 454) demonstrates that 'some [women] felt that women's nurturing and mothering abilities allowed for a different kind of vision and expressed beliefs that women see things differently from men'. Significantly, gender facilitates rather than blocks activism here.

Though we have seen that Leonie and others struggle to reconcile the roles of activist and mother, this appears to be because of how they feel the public perceives them rather than their own beliefs about the compatibility of the two roles. This suggests the possibility and fruitfulness of reconceptualising activism in terms of care, and combining the roles of mother and activist, with the former acting as a motivation for the latter. However, as well as the critiques of this approach that I raised earlier, there is the additional risk that women without children become excluded, as well as the danger that women may again be defined primarily by their role as mothers (carers) first and foremost, with everything else branching from this. It becomes clear that we need to carefully consider the relationship between care and activism, particularly in terms of gender, which I will do in the next chapter.

So far we have seen that participants perceive local anti-austerity activism to be dominated by male activists who neglect women's concerns, resulting in gendered exclusions and barriers to activism. Having explored these in detail, I now turn to consider how women have responded to such barriers and exclusions by forming their own resistance to austerity.

Overcoming gendered barriers: Women-only activism

In response to the male dominated environment of wider anti-austerity groups and their neglect of women's issues, participants propose women-led and women-focussed activism within women-only spaces. Hazel says "there's a lot of male privilege in them [activist groups], which is why I specifically set up my own, with other women, to collectively work against austerity as women". Similarly, Thorne (1975: 192) notes how, over time, issues of the gendered division of roles within the draft resistance movement led to women leaving and forming a women-only movement. However, in Thorne's case, women were 'outsiders' in a male-oriented movement, whereas women are more affected by austerity than men. Nevertheless, participants' narratives reflect findings that women's experiences within mixed gender movements differ from men's and that women's concerns are not listened to by men, leading to frustration and women breaking away to form women-only groups.

While participants recognise the function of women-only spaces as safe places for domestic abuse victims and survivors, they suggest that these spaces also provide women with a place to do activism where their voices are heard. Charlotte speaks of the difference between meetings where men attend and those that are women-only: "I think there is something to be said about that sort of female space that's respectful and calm", contrasting participants' accounts of mixed gender meetings that we saw earlier where male voices dominate and women often feel uncomfortable speaking. In fact, Beth suggests that the physical presence of the Women's Centre is a source of legitimacy for women's concerns and acts

as a “port in the storm”, indicating the significance of tangible, material space, a topic I will return to in the next chapter.

Women activists organise within women-only spaces to provide practical support to women who are bearing the brunt of the austerity measures. Following the People’s Assembly’s failure to provide childcare at a conference or listen to women’s concerns when this lack of childcare was raised, Hazel set up a local group of “women coming together to do something for women”. One of the group’s initiatives is a regular “swap-shop... a practical thing to swap toys, clothes, and books”. Demonstrating the intersection of class and gender, Alison says:

That was really good because that is very hands-on, it is what people need in times of austerity. I think maybe that is what she [Hazel] was thinking coming from quite a working class background, she was thinking about that and the stuff that working class women need.

We see here this notion that “practical” “hands-on” help is key; indeed, Alison talks about the importance of providing “real” help for women who “need a home because they are fleeing”, providing them with resources that are no longer publicly provided. This focus on providing everyday support reinforces Dodson’s (2015) contention that women activist groups tend to be concerned with the particular and the everyday, reinforcing his argument that we need to consider the kinds of activism that women do, not just the amount.

In fact, women have historically taken on the role of caring for the most vulnerable in communities, providing charity, education, and guidance for those in poverty through philanthropic work. Summers (1979) highlights women’s role in preventing the impoverished from entering the work-houses but also draws attention to the classed dimension of this, with it tending to be middle class women who supported the working class. Moreover, while such duties helped women to carve a

space for themselves and invent themselves as middle class, there is a paternalistic (or perhaps in this case, maternalistic) element whereby these women saw it as part of their duty to 'civilise' those below them in the social hierarchy and to spread the morals and values of the Empire project (Ibid). Significantly, the Swap Shop in Nottingham was set up by a working class woman who stressed the importance of providing support for other working class women, showing a difference in the class dynamics from such earlier projects. However, it is not as simplistic as this as, in practice, women who identify as middle class or have an ambivalent relationship with class also participated. Crucially, many of these women had working class roots and drew on these as reasons for participating, signifying that there remains a class dimension to women's activism which intersects with this gendered dimension.

However, while this response demonstrates a feminist resistance to austerity and empowers women, it is problematic given that women end up shouldering the additional care burden created by the public services deficit. This confirms the Fawcett Society's (2012) 'triple jeopardy' thesis where women are losing services, their jobs providing these services, and being expected to pick up the resulting work, unpaid. This expectation reflects underlying assumptions about the gendered nature of care and carries with it the risk that issues of public concern are being quietly pushed back into the private domain, along with women and their voices, thus reasserting traditional boundaries between the public and private spheres. Griffin (2015: 60) remarks that 'austerity policies are trying to turn back time, to an era of male breadwinners and dependent housewives'. Rather than this being an unintentional side effect of austerity, McRobie (2012) suggests that it reflects the political objectives of 'a Conservative vision of women primarily as mothers and carers'. In fact, Bramall (2013: 112) suggests that austerity practices such as being 'thrifty' are 'coded as work for women' by drawing on associations with femininity and qualities of the 'austere housewife [...] (such as patience,

care, altruism, and the ability to be organized and to multitask). Thus, austerity itself is gendered along traditional gendered divides in roles and norms. Moreover, and especially relevant here, Bramall (2016: 136) notes that there is a risk that those who provide such services become 'complicit with the imposition of austerity', thus reinforcing what they are fighting against. Therefore, women are not only disproportionately affected by austerity, but are excluded from mainstream anti-austerity activism and through their resistance practices, problematically, are reinforcing the gendered impact of austerity and its continuation.

Indeed, such responses feed into the Conservative idea of the 'Big Society', whereby individuals and groups within communities undertake voluntary work to provide required services. As Levitas (2012: 322) notes, this idea is a continuation of the New Right and New Labour focus on communitarianism and creating the 'good society', and is 'little more than an attempt to get necessary social labour done for nothing, disproportionately by women, by pushing work back across the market/non market boundary'. Drawing on this history, Gilbert (2016: 137) asserts that such responses are always problematic because effective progressive reform of public services requires funding. Indeed, Levitas (2012) notes that such policies neglect the necessity of material conditions which encourage and allow such community service provision. Hazel reinforces this:

Because there's this idea of 'Big Society', which has always been there. And it's very interesting that it's supposedly a Tory ideology when it was the Tories who decided that we don't need society and society is dead and community is dead. So, now that they've *killed* communities and people don't have toy libraries and baby clothes swaps, and stuff, now they want to bring it back, decimating public services to do so (scoffs). I don't know how they expect women and families to go out

and help each other plant things, grow things, share things, without any public spaces or services to facilitate that.

Hazel stresses the need for state funding for communities to provide support to individuals, with this being a joint responsibility that the state has pulled out of and which individuals are unable to perform because working class communities have been destroyed. Likewise, Levitas (2012: 335) contends that:

Many of the conditions of working class organisation have been eroded. It depends on relatively stable work and relatively stable local or work-based communities: social policies from Thatcher on have undermined these material bases of self-organisation, resilience and sociality.

However, Levitas (2012) argues that reading ideas of the Big Society through a 'hermeneutics of faith' (Ricoeur, 1981) enables us to trace the kernel of appeal and potential within such ideas, explaining why they have had some purchase among those who are not served by Coalition policies. Such an approach reflects 'an attempt to restore meaning to a narrative and its different voices and silences' (Levitas, 2012: 332). Significantly, Levitas (2012) asserts that there *is* something which has been lost and which individuals value, which is why the Big Society narrative and its appeal to community values has purchase. Hazel reflects this attitude, lamenting the erosion of working class communities:

Years ago there used to be, particularly working class communities, toy libraries, much like book libraries, so you could go and loan toys. These things don't exist anymore. There's also not the same level of community whereby you could go to your neighbour and swap clothes, baby clothes, and stuff with people that aren't family.

Using a hermeneutics of faith, then, enables us to grasp the positive and appealing aspects of influential discourses; however, it does not remove the negative impacts and uses of these discourses, such as the Big Society, as highlighted above. Taking the next step is to ask the question, as Levitas (2012: 331) does, ‘what are the economic and social conditions under which these ideas [of the Big Society] would cease to be repressive, moralizing claptrap?’ Levitas’ (2012: 336) answer is to rethink what counts as production and to value ‘human flourishing and well-being; promoting equality; addressing the quality of work; revaluing care, and thinking in terms of Total Social Organization of Labour; universal child benefit and a guaranteed basic income’. By providing a wage for social labour the conditions needed for the Big Society to work would be put in place and the value of care would be recognised. Further, this would address gender inequality as ‘recognising the care of vulnerable others as a skilled craft involving practical and emotional labour [...] would radically alter the gender settlement in terms of both redistribution and recognition’ (Levitas, 2012: 338). Likewise, Pearson and Elson (2015) suggest putting into place a feminist ‘Plan F’ that recognises the vital role of social reproduction and invests in this as an alternative to austerity. In fact, Pateman (1987:40) contends that ‘only public or collective provision can provide a proper standard of life and the means for meaningful social participation for all citizens in a democracy’. This returns us to considerations about the role of caring within wider society and suggests that we need to consider care not only as a public matter but also a collective one, recognising the contribution caregiving makes to social life. In this vein, Herd and Harrington Meyer (2002) define care work as civic participation and call for it to be recognised as such by social theorists.

It is clear from participants’ narratives that there is a need for feminist anti-austerity activism that mitigates the gendered barriers and exclusions that we have seen within local anti-austerity activism,

especially given that austerity disproportionately affects women. Indeed, Hazel contends that “until society isn’t sexist and patriarchy doesn’t exist, there will always be a need for women-only spaces. Particularly in any form of austerity fight-back, activism, anything like that”. Beth remarks that the feminist angle of anti-austerity campaigning is often ignored but needs to be taken into account because women are “undoubtedly” hit the hardest:

I think even the most hard-pressed neoliberal economist wouldn’t be able to deny the evidence that this is the case. That cuts in services affect women and children first and foremost... it should be shouted from the rooftops. Because women and girls are more than 50 percent of the population, it’s systematic discrimination.

Similarly, Dermot remarks “the people who are getting hit hardest are women. That’s just the statistical truth [...] so austerity is a women’s issue which means it is a feminist issue”. Specifically, participants speak about cuts to women’s services and public sector jobs, which tend to be part-time and occupied by women. In fact, 65 percent of public sector jobs are done by women, with nearly 40 percent of women’s jobs being in the public sector (Fawcett Society, 2012). Alison, a mother who had left her job in a women’s service because of austerity, reinforces this: “it is the double thing, isn’t it, of the public sector, which is mostly women that work in the public sector, and the welfare cuts that massively affect women [...] women are the victims, the first victims, because gender specific services are the first ones that go”. In fact, as we have seen, women face a ‘triple jeopardy’ which is tied to wider gender norms and assumptions about women as unpaid carers.

Given the fact that women bear the brunt of the austerity measures, and that austerity is recognised by participants as a feminist issue, we would expect there to be a gendered focus in local movements such as the

People's Assembly, with women activists being part of this. However, we have seen that this is not the case, raising the question of why this gendered dimension is invisible. I contend that this shortfall is the result of the gendered exclusions and barriers to activism which have been explored in this chapter, and which will be further outlined in regards to the ideal perfect activist identity in the next chapter.

Significantly, a central feature of participants' arguments for feminist anti-austerity activism is the notion that lived experiences reflect a more authentic experience and basis for activism. Here, feminist standpoint theory resurfaces, with its emphasis on women's lived experiences and the way these experiences provide the basis of a distinct epistemological position. Anna emphasises this:

I very strongly believe in women-only spaces, I think we need them just like I think that black people for example need black-only spaces. Because it doesn't matter how much someone is in solidarity with you, there's sometimes things that they don't quite experience in the same way as you, they don't quite feel in the same way as you.

Anna stresses the affective dimension of activism in relation to lived experiences, which other participants draw upon. Several male participants suggest that they cannot call themselves feminists, despite sharing the same values, because "I can't speak from the same, I don't have the lived experience" (Dermot). Here, lived experience is seen as distinct from "academic understanding" because it is "lived and felt". Jared reinforces this, suggesting that men are not affected in the same way by patriarchy and feminist issues and that only those with the experience of being a woman can claim the label of 'feminist'. This raises similar questions about who can legitimately and authentically claim the label of activist, as well as issues of representation in terms of who can

and who should speak about certain issues. It is to these questions which I now turn.

Who should do activism / be activist?

Having explored barriers that prevent individuals and groups from doing activism under the theme of who *can* do activism, there is the additional point to consider of who *should* do activism, according to participants. Participants emphasise the need for anti-austerity activism to be led by and for those who are the most affected by austerity. Dermot asserts “it’s individual people in individual circumstances who need to lead their struggles” and Martin contends that “really it has to come from people themselves and they have to realise through their own experience what works and what doesn’t”. Therefore, lived experiences are central to representative politics. However, as I have shown, those who are the most affected by austerity are not necessarily in a position to participate in activism, which problematises the suggestion that anti-austerity activism should be led by those who are most affected. Furthermore, while participants suggest that a key part of anti-austerity activism is making the “truth” and “reality” of living in poverty known to the wider public, there is also a wariness present about becoming a “case study of being skint” (Hazel) or the “poster-girl for intersectionality” (Lily). In this respect, participants value lived experiences as the basis for knowledge but are aware of the danger of these experiences being fetishised by others and of being treated as examples of particular conditions rather than as people. There is clearly a careful balancing act to be maintained here, with questions raised about who can legitimately speak about such issues; indeed, Alison says “we shouldn’t be speaking for people”.

In fact, Hazel contends that only those with lived experiences of the issues can speak about them and that without lived experiences, people’s activism is “inauthentic” and “fake”. Again, lived experiences form the basis for a privileged and more ‘real’ knowledge that has access to the ‘truth’ of reality. Further, we start to see that there are different ‘types’ of

activist arranged by participants into a hierarchy where those without lived experiences are less legitimate than those with them, who are considered to be 'true authentic' activists. Significantly, authenticity is a moral value that reflects desirable qualities such as 'credibility, originality, sincerity, naturalness, genuineness, innateness, purity, or realness' (Grazian, 2010: 191). Invoking this, participants refer to UK Uncut as 'pure' and 'organic'. Vannini and Williams (2009) suggest that such concerns with authenticity reflect the individual's desire to identify a 'true' permanent self within a postmodern context rife with uncertainty. There is a sense, then, that authenticity is an inherent quality that cannot be earned, yet it is paradoxically something which is defined and attributed by others. Authenticity is 'ascribed, not inscribed'; other activists decide who is 'authentic' or not, it is not a quality that is self-declared (Moore, 2002: 209). Speaking about the relationship between authenticity and music, Moore (2002: 213) notes that authenticity is identified 'by an honesty to experience'. Here, 'artists speak the truth of their own situation; that they speak the truth of the situation of (absent) others; and that they speak the truth of their own culture, thereby representing (present) others' (Moore, 2002: 209). This parallels how participants construct the 'authentic activist' identity with emphasis placed on speaking honestly about lived experiences, and of representing others with these shared experiences.

Notably, 'authenticity is so often associated with hardship and disadvantage' (Grazian, 2010: 192), which is reflected by the 'authentic activist' who is typically from a working class or disadvantaged background and has experienced 'real' life and hardship. This is amplified by contrasting the authentic activist to its inauthentic other — the 'middle class activist type'. Participants paint a caricature of a relatively wealthy, young activist who, at best, is out of touch with ordinary people's lived realities and, at worst, is a 'champagne socialist'

who should step aside to make room for 'real' activists, who are actually affected by austerity. Hazel says:

It's all well and good to pitch a tent in market square for a few months and claim that you're against capitalism and when you decide you've had enough, go home to your parents. It's not the same as people that have to live with these decisions, day in, day out.

Hazel draws attention to issues of privilege by highlighting the way in which such 'middle class activist types' have the choice to participate in actions and then walk away, not having to live the issues in the same way that those who are affected by austerity do. Therefore, while empathy is emphasised by participants as a motivation for activism, it appears that there are limits to this, and that to have a 'true' understanding of certain realities, one must have lived experiences of them. Furthermore, there is a concern here about the authenticity and thus legitimacy of not only the activist but the type of action too, with it being presented as a superficial display of resistance. Participants recount the origins of UK Uncut as being spontaneous and born on Twitter, preferring to distance themselves from the alternative origin story (involving a group of Oxbridge graduates) which contradicts this spontaneous emergence. This move is deliberate and perhaps can be explained by participants' disdain of this middle class, relatively wealthy young activist 'type'. Graeber (2013: 252) also touches upon this middle class activist stereotype within the U.S. context, speaking of 'trust fund baby activists', but, unlike my findings, Graeber suggests that it is a perception held by the media and general public rather than by other activists. We begin to see, then, how the identity of activist (in this case, the 'authentic activist'), is constructed and upheld within the activist community.

Clearly, lived experiences and feelings are central to this construction of the authentic activist and its opposite. Indeed, Bobel's (2007: 153) participants contend:

that an issue must literally be 'lived', in this case materially embodied, for true activism to take place. And what is important about embodiment? [...] if an issue is woven into the everyday, lived reality of an individual, it is inescapably personal.

Similarly, Helen suggests that individuals should speak about what they know and what personally affects them:

If I was speaking I would usually speak about something that I had a particular perspective on, so at the time I was working in a college with kids who had been excluded from school or had been youth offenders, and would try and narrow down to the effects on the specific people that I knew something about. And speak personally.

Phillips (1991: 114) contends that 'political aims and objectives should be grounded in personal experience and, instead of occupying a distinctively "political" terrain, should arise out of and speak back to each individual's life'. Significantly, participants interpret personal experiences as providing a more honest and authentic basis for activism, problematising who can and should represent people who are the most affected by austerity.

Issues of representation

Participants demonstrate tension about speaking on behalf of other groups. James notes how "It is all well and good me saying well people are suffering, but I don't feel it in the same way that a lot of people do... fundamentally we weren't the people bearing the brunt of austerity". Will argues:

Well, I only think you can represent yourself. You can support those, so yeah about the disability cuts you can go along and support the action, I couldn't go there and speak personally about it because I wouldn't know, I'm not personally being affected by it, but I would go there to support those who are being affected.

However, unlike Hazel who contends that only those with lived experiences of issues can speak about them, Alex argues that limiting activism in this way is problematic as it creates divides between 'insiders' and 'outsiders':

I don't like this idea of insiders and outsiders as far as things are concerned because if you go down that path then people in comas perhaps should be the only people who can advocate for people in comas. You know what I mean? So, we have to be, we have to have solidarity with each other. And that's not about co-opting and taking over people's movements when you pretend to have, to know their interests more than they do, shouldn't be doing that. But as far as supporting, according to what people wish you to support them in then yeah, I'm all for that but yeah, I don't wish to speak for other people.

Here, then, solidarity is distinguished from empathy as it does not require one to understand or feel another's experience. For Alex, others can advocate on behalf of those affected but it is important that they do not speak over them. Alex makes a distinction between supporting individuals and speaking *for* them, with the emphasis being that one shouldn't try to co-opt or lead movements but to offer support for causes. Adrian reinforces this, contending that he will stand up for people who are being attacked or are suffering but is keen to qualify that this does not mean that he is "speaking for them". Likewise, Jared says

that individuals can support groups that they do not belong to and “aid their voice” but that they cannot speak for them. The key point is respecting others, their experiences and feelings, and being aware of one’s own position by being careful to not assert authority over someone else, particularly someone in a more disadvantaged position, reminding us of the issue of privilege.

However, there is a danger of putting too much emphasis on difference and lived experiences as a source of authority, or of ‘clinging to marginality’ (Tanesini, 1999: 148), namely that this logic can be reversed to imply that marginal groups can *only* speak about marginality and that what they have to say is *only* relevant to their own group, thus meaning they will be ignored by everyone else. Further, the focus on oppression as a basis for a ‘truer’ knowledge, as demonstrated by Hazel, provokes debate about whether someone loses their insight if they stop being oppressed, and there is the risk that concerns about representation devolve into an ‘oppression hierarchy’ whereby individuals become preoccupied with establishing who is more oppressed (Letherby, 2003: 47). We are reminded of the opening discussion about ‘checking one’s privilege’, and the ways that this has become a damaging practice within activist communities. Participants privately refer to the problem of ‘oppression top trumps’ that exists within activist cultures where individuals try to ‘out-oppress’ others in order to prove that their standpoint and views are more legitimate and ‘true’. It emerges, then, that there is a careful balancing act to perform between recognising and respecting difference and becoming preoccupied with ‘oppression hierarchy’ and standpoint theories which negate anyone speaking about topics which they do not personally experience. As Letherby (2003: 51) warns, ‘a focus on diversity can therefore lead to problems in collaboration and ultimate depoliticization’.

In contrast to many participants, Anna suggests that in some contexts not having a lived experience of the issues can afford the speaker more legitimacy:

I mean I don't represent them [Muslim students] as coming from that community but... the way they put it to me was that... if they spoke about it because they are the people who are actually directly affected by it, they can be dismissed. I mean if you think as a woman or as a feminist, sometimes it can be dismissed 'oh, that's your subjective experience', you can't speak. Whereas there is this kind of assumption that if you're the white person who happens to be Muslim, you're maybe more objective, maybe you've heard more than one story.

Anna's comments about how subjectivity is dismissed reflects how emotion has traditionally been pitched in opposition to reason and perceived to be an inadequate basis for argument or 'truth'. Notably, this perspective is gendered with men tending to be associated with the rational side of this dichotomy and women with the emotional and subjective which become linked to irrationality, suggesting that this (feminine) type of knowledge is inferior. Feminist theory challenges this position by arguing for the legitimacy and value of feminist knowledge that emerges from women's lived experiences.

Nonetheless, Anna draws our attention to the importance of context, noting that this occurred in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 when Muslim students:

Very often they were even scared to speak for themselves. So they would come and tell me and then I would have to represent them because they would think that a non-Muslim person would be heard better than they would be heard in terms of what was happening.

This is problematic as it reinforces the notion that only particular voices can speak and will be listened to and prevents attempts to actually change that. However, given that it was the wishes of the particular students that she was representing and that these students actually felt scared to speak, this was perhaps the only solution available. We are reminded of Joe's earlier suggestion that individuals can use their privilege to draw attention to the views of oppressed groups who would otherwise be ignored. Indeed, there is the problem not only of who can speak but also of who gets listened to; as Mary remarks "there are a whole sort of tranche of people there who I think have been disproportionately affected and who haven't got the voice to be able to do anything about that".

For many participants, a key problem is that those affected by the issues are not in a position of power where they are listened to and that those who are in power lack the lived experiences to understand the issues. Participants demonstrate concern with this democratic deficit and its impacts. Hazel contends that there is a massive gap between "those at the top and those at the bottom" and attributes this to the fact that those in power do not understand "the real world" because they have always lived a life of privilege. Crucially, mainstream politics is not representative; Mel claims that 78 percent of politicians are millionaires and thus out of touch with people's real lives. Lily remarks "parliament doesn't even reflect the make-up of this country. That's the sad thing" and Jared contends that "the representatives, political representatives, are representing the minority — they're generally from public schools and have attended Eton and are from very privileged backgrounds". Often, participants suggest that the neglect of the real effects of policies on people's daily lives and particularly on vulnerable groups is caused by this lack of representativeness within government. For Dana, unlike Hazel who suggests that austerity is a deliberate attack on poorer people,

this gap between the powerful and “ordinary people” is to blame for the resulting negative impacts on particular groups:

And that’s not probably happened because somebody thought oh sod them, it’s happened because the people in that room had no insight into that, it’s happened because there was nobody in that room to say wait a minute, before we go any further with this how will this impact, I mean not just women in vulnerable positions but anybody in a vulnerable situation... this is why parliament needs to be representative of the people and it bloody well isn’t.

Furthermore, participants contend that this problem of representativeness and access is mirrored within the activist community, a point which is demonstrated by activism’s neglect of gendered concerns.

Crucially, the central argument made by participants is that those who are the most affected by austerity need to be listened to and not dictated to. Hazel states that people should “shut up and listen”. Similarly, Mel contends that we should listen to people about their lived experiences as they are the experts of their situation and should be the ones to bring about change. Jared and Owain contend that the people who are affected have to be involved *because* they are directly affected, therefore others need to listen to both understand better and to know what change those who are affected want and need. For Owain, this means that activists should concentrate on connecting “basic issues of bread and butter questions” to wider politics in order for people to feel that politics is relevant to their lives. Henry notes the importance of “feeling that you are being listened to”. Furthermore, Dana acknowledges that issues are not “black and white” and asserts “I don’t know what the answer is but for god’s sake it’s not to stop listening”. A key aspect of this ‘listening’ is

paying attention to others who have lived experiences which you do not, as Dana points out:

Where women of colour are talking about their experiences of sexism and racism intersecting, I let them talk. It's not for me to comment 'cause I've not experienced it so I won't very often comment at all except to say thank you and I'm listening.

Again we see the importance of intersectionality and personal lived experiences for having the authority to speak about a certain issue. However, there is also the implication here that even in this situation, Dana is the one with the power as she is able to allow others to speak, and to choose to listen (or not), again drawing our attention to the role played by privilege in issues of representation and voice.

Activism as a luxury?

So far we have seen that the financial, temporal, and energy costs of activism prevent people who are less privileged in these areas from doing activism. Privilege has emerged throughout this chapter in terms of who can and should do activism and who can speak about certain issues, and be listened to. In fact, because of the privilege that participants have, they have the opportunity to channel their frustrations and desire for change into more socially-acceptable actions. In this respect, participants possess the cultural, symbolic, and social capital that enables them to engage politically in a more socially acceptable way (Bourdieu, 1986). Participants demonstrate this by drawing comparisons between Uncut and the 2011 riots, arguing that both arose from the same emotions and concerns but that these frustrations were channelled differently. James notes how “they were both born out of a similar thing which is awareness that things aren't right”. He elaborates:

Speaking to people on the night [of the riots] you definitely got the sense that even if it was very gruff, very guttural and ill-educated understanding of how things stand that they [the

rioters] knew what was going on, that they knew what they were doing and there was an awareness of it, they just weren't sort of channelling it into the accepted ways.

Helen says:

I think that's interesting in terms of the riots, that the people who finally took that sort of action were people who were genuinely disenfranchised, as in genuinely had very little to lose. I might think that it's fine to destroy property in order to get a political gain, but I also think that my work in education is really important and if I throw a brick through a window, that then means that I am not a teacher anymore, almost certainly. And so, there's levels of involvement in society, I think you have to reach quite an extreme point for people who are assimilated into the society to be able to take actions that put themselves at risk.

She goes on to say that:

It is at huge times of disruption, so, in revolutions, or in the riots in London, or whatever, you do get the people who are actually oppressed involved in fighting it. I think what happens with more regular activism is it's people who have the levels of social awareness and the levels of consciousness to be able to become involved. The key group, I suppose, is people who work with people who are disadvantaged.

It could be argued then that 'regular activism' is a luxury that only the 'privileged', in terms of cultural and symbolic capital, can afford, given its financial and temporal costs and required social [under]standing. At the same time, more confrontational action is a risk which 'regular' activists cannot afford to take precisely because of their position in society. Indeed, several participants felt constrained by the risk of losing their

jobs because of participating in activism, with those who work in the public sector (and the most affected by public spending cuts) being particularly aware of this risk. Beth speaks about the structural constraints of being an activist and working within an institutional setting, referring to herself as a “tempered radical”. Such fears about losing one’s job were related to the real risk of police control and arrest at direct actions. Dermot acknowledges that direct action often involves the danger of “putting yourself on the line”. Participants also speak of the less physical but nonetheless daunting risk of public humiliation, with Harry remarking “if you stand up like a nail, you’ll be knocked down”. Significantly, though men spoke about the risks involved in activism, women seemed especially susceptible to the risks of direct action, with mothers having concerns about the safety of their children at protests: “so in that sense I think it is harder for women [...] I think you don’t take as many risks with kids probably”. Furthermore, women were more likely to work in the public sector than men, thus meaning that concerns about losing one’s job were also gendered.

Within this chapter, I have explored the central questions of who can and who should do activism and/or be an activist. We have seen the existence of barriers and exclusions that prevent individuals, especially women, from participating politically. We have also seen how participants decide who should be an activist, according to attributes of authenticity and lived experiences, which combine to produce the ‘authentic activist’ identity. Threaded throughout these discussions is the distinction drawn between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’ — a boundary which requires further inspection.

‘Activist’ and/or ‘non-activist’?

The distinction drawn between activist and non-activist is significant and problematic; raising key questions about what distinguishes activists from non-activists and the potential impact of constructing this divide. While Anna contends that everyone *should* do activism, she

acknowledges that not many people do and therefore suggests that the term 'activist' is required as a way of distinguishing between those who do activism and those who do not:

I said to myself it's [activism] what good people do. Good people stand up against injustice. And activist sounds like 'cause you've... I don't know, you're kind of special I guess. But I think, now that I've lived long enough on this earth, I've come to realise that most people don't do anything and I guess you do need a label to differentiate between the people who do and the people who don't. However sad that is. Yeah. Yeah so I guess now I would consider myself an activist, in that respect.

Likewise, Harry says that activism "is what everybody should be doing, by nature" and yet distinguishes himself as an 'activist' and says he sees "it as the definition of my identity". Unlike Harry, Anna highlights the notion that activist sounds like "you're kind of special" and seems reluctant to claim the title herself because of this.

Critically, Anna and other participants contradict the notion that anyone can be an activist by suggesting that activists are a particular type of person, thus implying that to be an activist requires innate qualities that cannot be earned. Anna demonstrates this by comparing herself to her partner who she does not identify as an activist and wonders: "what makes me such an individual and not him?" We are reminded of comments made by Adrian in the last chapter about how he has always felt the need to stand up against injustice, even from childhood, again suggesting that this attitude is perhaps something innate. Similarly, Charlotte suggests that activists tend to be caring people:

I think you have to look after yourself because you can just see, I think if you really care, you're a really caring person, I think a lot of activists are, you can just see the world as a

complete mess and that it's your job to fix it all and you're never going to do that. And that can leave people very sort of overwhelmed.

Charlotte constructs activism as a vocation and draws attention to the strains and risks of activism, which I will explore in the next chapter. She also highlights this notion that activists are more caring, more sensitive, and more likely to be hurt; as Mel suggests, those who are “choosing to think bigger and around things are more sensitive, tend to be empathics, will get hurt”. Therefore, though participants claim that empathy is a universal human quality, there is the implication here that activists are naturally more empathetic than others, reinforcing the notion that an ‘activist’ is a particular type of person.

At the same time, however, participants speak about activism as a journey, suggesting that people become activists by learning and being critical and reflexive about theory and their own experiences. In this respect, ‘activist’ is an identity to work towards and which shifts over time according to what activities an individual is involved in. Here, the idea emerges that the type and level of activism which one does impact upon who is considered to be an activist, a theme which I will turn to shortly. Clearly, this is problematic as it suggests that those who are not able to do much action, or certain types of action, cannot be activists (and we have seen many barriers to doing activism in this chapter). Furthermore, this shifting of the identity over time contradicts the notion that being an activist is linked to an innate quality or essence that exists within some people and not within others. Yet, we have seen the emphasis placed on lived experiences as a basis for authentic and legitimate activism, with the overarching notion being that only those with particular lived experiences can be ‘true authentic’ activists. Lived experiences are again something which cannot be learned, indeed, participants point out the differences between abstractly understanding a concept and actually living it, with the latter being deemed a more

authentic basis for doing activism. In this respect, then, it appears that being an activist is the result of a personal journey, but that certain individuals are predisposed towards being activists. Moreover, the idea that activists are a distinct type of person that is different to others clearly contradicts the notion that activism can be done by anyone and everyone, as well as the claim that activism should be a universal activity. Perhaps the point to be made here is that while activism is indeed perceived to be something which can be done by anyone (though to do activism requires a certain level of privilege), to be or to become an *activist* requires extra qualifications. This draws our attention to some of the tensions and ambivalence surrounding the activist identity which are revealed through participants' narratives and which further underline the distinction drawn between doing activism and being activist. Indeed, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 25) assert that 'the concept of who is "activist" and thus "non-activist" is contested and fluid [...] in reality activist identities are complex, multi-layered and hybrid'.

In fact, Chatterton (2006: 261) contends that there is a need to 'transcend the role of activist' in order to foster dialogue between so-called 'activists and their others'. Here, the role and label of activist act as a barrier to interactions between activists and the public. Similarly, Jared contends that the activist community is not welcoming to "outsiders" or a friendly environment for non-activists to ask questions and learn. He and Adrian refer to "left activist elitism" where particular language is used that excludes those who are not knowledgeable about political theory and those who do not already move within activist circles. We are again reminded of the initial discussion about the problem of telling others to 'check your privilege' and how it is tied to an exclusive activist mentality. Adrian suggests that this attitude is "condescending and egotistical" and "excludes huge portions of people who don't read theory". Furthermore, Jared suggests that activist passion can come across to non-activists as aggression and "put people off". He recognises that a confrontational

approach does not work for everyone but that it tends to be the dominant approach within activism and that this can therefore make people shut down, producing another barrier. Again it is more likely to be vulnerable individuals who are excluded because the tone of aggression creates a space which is not safe or comfortable to enter. Hope (2014) contends that ‘this has become an access issue — only those with robust mental health and low sensitivity or trauma that’s so entrenched they’ve dissociated from it, need apply’.

While being part of a close-knit community can help to sustain participants’ activism, it can also act as a barrier to other people getting involved. Mansbridge (1980: 9) recognises the central role friendship can play in sustaining political participation, noting how, once individuals become friends, ‘the costs of participation, of which some make so much, do not feel heavy’. However, Phillips (1991: 125-6) also acknowledges that:

For those already involved, the absence of formal structures, the informality, the shared jokes and references, were a part of what the [women’s] movement was about. These very same phenomena could seem mysterious and exclusionary to those not yet accepted as friends.

Participants were aware of how the core group of Notts Uncut could be seen as “a bit cliquy” (Will), which was a barrier that the group struggled to overcome, raising the question of whether groups can sustain themselves over time if they remain cliquy. Indeed, whilst participants argue that Uncut was inclusive, they also acknowledge the need to attract new activists and that they were often failing to reach outside of the group, resulting in a lack of diversity. Participants refer to the “activist bubble” as a space which can be “quite insular” and accuse it of “talking to itself sometimes”, resulting in concerns that activists are “preaching to the converted”. Notably, participants appear to reify this “bubble”, treating it as an external object which almost has a life of its

own, thus distancing individuals from their actions and removing responsibility. This “activist bubble” is accused of creating and perpetuating an “activist false consciousness” whereby individuals believe that the majority of people think and feel the same way that they do. Alison reinforces this saying that it can be hard to know what the “general opinion” is when she is surrounded by activists. Brown and Pickerill (2009: 29) contend:

A downside to the creation of these activist spaces of familiarity, solidarity and support is that they can ultimately become cliques which enclose rather than open up the possibilities for political engagement. Not only do we become comfortable within them (and thus struggle when in the unfamiliar) but by definition they exclude others.

We are reminded, then, of Chatterton’s (2006) warning that activists need to step outside of the activist role in order to encourage connections with those who do not currently participate in activism. This links to ideas about redefining activism in terms of the quotidian, especially relating to caring activities and roles. Corrigan-Brown (2012: 3) contends that although the common notion of ‘activist’ is of exceptional individuals, in reality ‘it is the realm of the many’ with people following episodic and intermittent trajectories of engagement over time. In fact, she contends that ‘it is not the specific behaviours in which one engages but the meaning one assigns to those behaviours that leads to the development of an activist identity’ (2012: 114). As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the activist label, identity, and participants’ conceptualisations of this are complex and ambivalent. The next chapter will further elucidate the ways in which the activist identity is constructed, understood, and performed by participants.

However, despite attempts to widen the definition of activism in order to make it more accessible and inclusive of everyday acts, such as Lily’s

assertion that activism is “not just like, you know, going to a protest and waving a flag, it’s sort of like if you go online or if you write something, or if you organise a talk, that’s activism in itself”, individuals are often criticised by other activists for “not doing enough” or for not doing the ‘right’ *type* of activism, with direct action being privileged over other forms of activism. We have seen that the activist community can provide a sense of belonging which acts as a motivating and sustaining factor for doing activism but which can also be intimidating for non-activists and thus exclusive. However, there is also a negative side to this activist community which impacts upon current activists and which is prominent throughout participants’ narratives, despite being hidden from public view — it is here that we see the ‘dark side’ of activism emerge.

Chapter 7: The Dark Side of Activism: Doing ‘Enough’ of the ‘Right’ Thing?

So far I have explored the motivating and sustaining factors for doing activism, looking at the positive and enabling aspects of activist cultures including solidarity, community, and hope. I have also considered existing barriers which prevent political participation, including practical constraints and gendered exclusions within activist cultures. As Alexander (2013: 1) asserts in reference to modernity, ‘there has always been a dark part that offers a kind of counterpoint to the light part’. He (2013: 3) speaks of modernity as ‘Janus-faced’, both forwards and backwards looking at the same time, remarking that ‘even when you’re moving through something, you’re also drawn back into the chaos’. Alexander’s analysis of the messy, ambivalent nature of modernity is well suited to understanding the complexity of meanings and experiences of ‘doing activism and being activist’. Throughout the previous two chapters, I have explored the distinction made between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’, as well as who can or who *should* be an activist, in the eyes of participants. I intend to build upon this by exploring further how the identity of ‘activist’ is constructed, understood, and performed (or resisted) by participants and, in particular, the implications of this.

Having explored the ‘authentic activist’ identity and the contradictions surrounding it, this chapter will focus on the ‘ideal perfect activist’ identity which is defined by the type and level of activism one does. Here, activists are judged by other activists for not doing ‘enough’ of the ‘right’ type of activism (in particular, for doing online activism rather than direct action). I have labelled this identity ‘ideal perfect’ to reflect how participants construct it as the ‘gold standard’ of activist, which is the goal to aim for. The use of the word ‘ideal’ also reflects the reality that this standard is not often achievable, despite its prominence in

participants' narratives. It is important to remember that despite their contradictions and the way that I have separated them for analytical purposes, the two constructions of 'activist' (authentic and ideal perfect) are often combined to produce an overarching and definitive activist identity. This implies that individuals need to have relevant lived experiences, be motivated by the 'right' things, and do a certain amount of the 'right' type of activism in order to achieve the 'activist' label. Clearly, the bar is set high, which not only has repercussions (which will be explored within this chapter), but also contradicts the notion of activism being a universal and accessible activity where "doing what you can" is all that matters (as we have seen in previous chapters).

To begin with, I will explore how both constructions of the activist identity are maintained by other activists through activist shaming, before investigating how the activist identity is constructed and contested by players inside and outside of the activist community. It emerges that rather than being a self-identification, 'activist' is a title to be earned and awarded by somebody else. In this respect, the 'activist' title acts as a form of symbolic capital, with those who are rewarded it being granted status and a good reputation (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, this is tied to social capital, or the individuals' links and connections within activist circles. I will expand upon the idea of doing the 'right' *level* of activism and examine the implications of this, focussing on the negative effects of activism, including activist burnout. Crucially, these negative effects are implicitly gendered, adding to gendered barriers and exclusions to political participation. I will then explore the criteria of the 'right' *type* of activism by discussing the dichotomies of talking versus action and online versus offline activism, which underlie this particular construction of the activist identity, and highlight the ways in which such constructions are also potentially gendered, to the detriment of women activists.

Given the pervasiveness and severity of these negative impacts, combined with the way in which this dimension of activist cultures tends to be hidden from public view, I contend that these behaviours and their consequences constitute the 'dark side' of activism. Furthermore, there are two layers to this 'dark side' of activism. The first is the recognised negative behaviours such as activist shaming through which individuals police other activists' behaviour; while the second, deeper layer is largely unnoticed by participants and consists of the subtler negative impacts, including the gendered guilt and anxiety that arise and the insidious self-policing that runs rife. By exploring the contradictory and problematic ways in which the activist identity is constructed and negotiated within activist cultures, and the obscured negative implications of this, I hope to illuminate this lesser seen 'dark side' of activism.

Being policed by others: Activist shaming

Being and feeling judged by other activists' values is central to the dark side of activism, with such judgements determining who can claim the activist identity. Bobel (2007: 150) remarks that 'it is values that shape the very definition of who is and who is not appropriately considered an activist'. Participants feel that they do not qualify as activists because they do not do "enough" activism or because they "only" do online activism, reflecting the criteria of the 'right' type and level of activism. Significantly, this judgement comes from within the activist community. Jared claims that there is a "level of snobbery among activists" where some activists hold the opinion that "I'm more of an activist and more anti-oppression than you". Conflict over the salience of particular values, notably veganism, feeds into this attitude and reveals a potential downside to considering all oppressions as equal and interlocking, for activists are penalised when they neglect one which other activists consider to be central. Certainly, for Adrian, Dermot, and Alex, animal welfare and veganism form the basis of their activism, as Adrian

proclaims, “because I think it sets the tone for the rest of exploitation that occurs”.

However, participants contend that “white vegan males” tend to be particularly aggressive about their views and judgemental of others. Anna recalls having been told that she is “an evil, bad person” for not being vegan and reports occasions where:

Some of them go as far as to say well if you’re not a vegan you have no right then to speak about the oppression of women, I mean some of them literally say stuff like that, they don’t imply it they actually say it, or you have no right to talk about peace and to talk about anti-violence because you kill and eat animals.

This militant veganism acts as a barrier to many getting involved in activism as it “puts people off”. Portwood-Stacer (2013: 9) notes how within anarchist cultures, lifestyle practices ‘become targets of self-righteous moralizing and other forms of social policing’, which she terms ‘politicking over lifestyle’. She draws on veganism as a key example of such politicking and warns that this judgemental practice can ‘fracture bonds of solidarity among activists who make different lifestyle choices’. Anna remarks: “out of all of the ‘isms’ it’s [veganism] quite... I don’t know whether it’s the people propagating it but it’s kind of quite forceful in a way that I’ve never experienced before”. In this regard, individuals compete over symbolic and cultural capital within the activist ‘field’; a social space which acts as its own little world, or a ‘separate universe governed by its own laws’ (Grenfell, 2008: 70; Bourdieu, 1992). As Grenfell (2008: 69) asserts, accumulation of capital is at stake within particular contexts, or fields, resulting in competition to maintain or improve one’s standing within that field.

In fact, Hope (2014) suggests that ‘the emphasis on force within activism is a very competitive, dominating model that also privileges what are

traditionally seen as more “masculine” behaviours over more “feminine” ones’. We begin to see how the activist identity and culture are gendered, with traditionally ‘masculine’ behaviours being prioritised over others, reflecting the subtle ‘masculine domination’ outlined by Bourdieu (2001) which permeates social life and which underlies a taken-for-granted doxa, resulting in gendered symbolic violence. It appears, then, that alternative spaces of resistance inadvertently mirror the gendered power dynamics of the dominant spaces they seek to resist. Indeed, I contend that the activist ‘doxa’ serves to naturalise and obscure traditionally masculine behaviours which form the benchmark of what it means to be an activist and which are perceived to be abstract and gender-neutral by participants, as we will see throughout this chapter. I will explore this further when examining how direct action is constructed as the ‘right’ type of activism, and explain how this is implicitly gendered.

In a similar fashion to Portwood-Stacer (2013), Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012: 49) assert that informal hierarchies exist within movements that are based on ‘moral evaluations and distinctions’. Here, ‘activists construct a moral hierarchy in which actions are ranked by their morality and activists are assigned different positions closer to or further from the sphere of “the sacred”’. Having a high position in this hierarchy enables one to lay claim to an activist identity. Anna reflects this, speaking of an “evangelical” activist mind-set:

They have this look on their face that they’ve seen the truth and you can’t see it. But they’re actually patronising you in a way, without even realising that their belief system is quite egotistical. Some activists are actually exactly like that, they have seen the truth, they know about capitalism and patriarchy and all of the rest of it and ‘oh poor you’, and I think that’s a horrific, it’s a massive, actually obstacle to activism.

We are reminded of discussions in the last chapter about the way in which activists position themselves as more knowledgeable, and hence more privileged, than other people. Likewise, Portwood-Stacer's (2013: 42) participants refer to a 'holier-than-thouism' attitude among activists. She (2013: 34) remarks:

Whether anarchists intend to or not, they may give the impression that their rejection of norms is done to demonstrate their intellectual superiority to the masses who aren't sophisticated enough to have developed a political critique of mainstream culture.

Anna claims that this attitude is ego-driven and selfish, reflecting the very individualistic values which such activists claim to be against (as we saw in chapter 5). Furthermore, this attitude then acts as a barrier to doing activism because it excludes individuals with less knowledge or experience of activism and also deters other activists from participating because they do not wish to be associated with these attitudes, which Portwood-Stacer (2013: 34) identifies as 'alienating'. Hope (2014) summarises the damaging effects of this 'competitive capitalist activism', which has created an environment:

Where people who could be working together are constantly jumping down each other's throats. Please note: this kind of crass telling off is not the same as challenging – challenging is good, but doing it in a way that the person can hear, rather than in a way designed to put a person down and make them feel so small they instinctively want to fight their way back up.

This 'crass telling off' links back to earlier discussions about the damaging way 'check your privilege' has been used by activists to police and shame others. In fact, Portwood-Stacer (2013: 42) notes that without a critical interrogation of what being a 'real' anarchist means, 'holding people accountable can easily be mistaken (or actually devolve into) self-

righteous moralism and arbitrary boundary policing'. Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012: 53) contend that, paradoxically, 'we are both moral and social creatures, which entail a need to put significant effort into being viewed as moral by others — which in itself is a non-moral activity'. There appears, then, to be a dark side to the motivating force of morals, for while morality is concerned with what is 'good', the activities which we undertake to be considered moral and how this morality is then enforced within communities can become destructive.

Notably, the pressure to conform comes from other activists rather than outside of the activist community, with such performances of morality being inward-facing, directed towards other activists, rather than outwards-facing to the public (Jacobsson and Lindblom, 2012: 52). Therefore, radical movements constitute their own hegemonic spheres, or 'an alternative hegemony' with their own rules which members are encouraged to adhere to (Denning, 1997: 63, cited in Portwood-Stacer, 2013: 87). Again, we see how local activist cultures constitute a 'field' with its own doxa and habitus and, within which, individuals compete over both the attainment of symbolic capital, as well as the value and definitions of such capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Participants' narratives reveal that these values are upheld, and the moral hierarchy enforced, through the practice of activist shaming. Jack demonstrates this, referring to a time when he was called a "chicken" by other activists for not wanting to occupy a store with only 5 people:

This is something that we, when I was first involved, would call moralism, and it's when you sort of try and use, turn protesting into a morality and then try and use it against people who aren't willing to do these things. And I sort of felt like well this is more akin to religion than it is to politics, it's sort of making judgments about people.

Jack reveals the dark side of groups with strong bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), where part of the group's strength and cohesiveness is rooted in excluding the 'other' which does not conform to the group's norms. In other words, 'we are united and confident in our identity because we know what we are not, and that which we are not is to be expelled':

The left looks more like a religion now, it's got the interpretation of texts, so what did Lenin say, and people will go into long arguments about what that really means and it's got that sort of element of moralism and cultism and do you believe this as fervently as I do and if not, get out of my group.

(Jack)

Again, we see activism referred to as a 'religion', reflecting earlier comments about activists' evangelical fervour, devotion, and desire to be near 'the sacred'. Morris criticises people for holding up certain theorists and texts as "sacred cows". It seems that, for some, activism is like a secular religion, which provides meaning and a clear set of moral values within what is deemed to be a corrupt world. Moreover, in terms of group definition and boundaries, there are similarities with anarchist cultures and more conventional identity-based movements such as LGBT groups, where there is 'endless infighting about who has the right to claim membership in identity categories and who has the right to speak on behalf of the oppressed' (Portwood-Stacer, 2013: 37). This was raised in the last chapter regarding issues of authentic representation and its relation to lived experiences of oppression; what is key is the ways in which close groups work to maintain definitions of what being a member of that group means. Whilst close friendships help to sustain activism for many, there is a dark side where 'the other side of the coin is the infamous moralism that political movements so often produce' (Phillips, 1991: 113). Portwood-Stacer (2013: 42) speaks about the 'sectarian' attitude among anarchist groups who are 'closed off, cliquy, dogmatic or even

elitist'. Despite anti-austerity activism being a more horizontally organised, 'networked' movement, such features of group politics are still present, demonstrated by participants' comments.

This attitude and 'type' of activist is considered to be such a barrier to activism that Anna distances herself from the label 'activist' because of it:

I think that's why for a very long time I even didn't like to use that word activism because I always used to associate people who call themselves activist have such kind of a personality, way of conducting themselves, and I never wanted to be associated with those people and I still hope I'm not.

Similarly, Stuart (2013: 114) notes how 'people discursively distance themselves from various forms of activist or political identity [...] because of the social meaning it has come to represent'. Indeed, Stuart (2013: 170) remarks that 'the negative stereotype functions as a barrier if people do not want to be seen to be associated with "self-righteous", "extreme" protestors'. Further, she (2013: 115) draws our attention to the similarities between the activist and feminist identity, given the ways in which stereotypes of the two create barriers to participation, demonstrated by so-called "I'm not a feminist, but..." literature.

However, Anna asserts that:

This is a very small minority of people also, I'm not sure whether it's worth demonising them too much. And I'm not sure they make a great disservice, like some people think 'oh it makes a disservice to the movement', not really, I don't think so, I think that's silly.

Despite concentrating on the issue of activist judgement and shaming for a large proportion of the interview and admitting that these practices have damaging impacts on individuals, Anna minimises their effect here. This could be out of loyalty to the movements that she is involved in and

a desire to protect them from negative attention or perhaps a way of removing the power from these activists through asserting their irrelevance. Certainly, not all activists experience this negative aspect of activism, Lydia notes “I have never really faced any kind of judgement for not doing everything else, it is more sort of a lot of praise for doing what you do do”. Lydia hints at one of the key criteria of being an activist, namely, the level of activism one does, which I will discuss in more detail later. It is worth noting that Lydia’s experiences may differ because she is mainly involved with student protests and less a part of the wider activist community. Furthermore, while Anna highlights that it is a small minority of people who act this way, it is indisputable that this minority has a loud voice given that almost all participants referred to it. Such activists and their judgemental behaviours may not be visible to the general public but they certainly have an impact on those within the activist community. Participants appear to internalise such values and judgements, resulting in widespread anxiety and guilt that they “are not doing enough” or that they do not do the ‘right’ type of activism, as we shall see later in this chapter. We start to see, then, how the identity of ‘activist’ is constructed and maintained within activist cultures, as well as its contested nature.

Constructing and contesting the ‘activist’ identity: Inside and out

Despite this ‘dark side’ of the close friendships within the activist community, there is another side to this dynamic whereby activists have a shared understanding of the activist identity which deviates from the more negative, arrogant portrayal of the activist shown above. Like Anna and others, Alex says: “I’m kind of uneasy with the idea of it [the ‘activist’ label] because... like for a number of reasons, like I think it can sound arrogant to think of yourself as an activist”. Bobel’s (2007: 153) participants remark that ‘there was some connotation of better than thou or arrogance attached to activist’. Perhaps in rejection of this arrogance,

participants displayed what I began to call ‘activist modesty’ where even those who are incredibly active say “I don’t do much” and “I’m doing little bits”. Indeed, Bobel (2007: 150) notes her participants’ concerns about appearing arrogant and suggests that ‘the conception of activist is anchored in key values of humility’. This perhaps explains participants’ reluctance sometimes to call themselves activists, as well as their disdain of other activists’ “arrogance”, which flouts these values of the ‘ideal perfect’ activist. However, this ‘activist modesty’ may also be related to the criteria of ‘doing enough’ activism, signifying that participants do not feel that they reach the required level of activism to claim the activist label and thus underestimate the amount that they do — a topic I will return to.

Crucially, however, Alex contends that ‘activist’ is used within particular networks where a shared critical understanding of the label exists: “if I’m talking to people like, that I observe and I know that they get what we’re talking about, I’m happy to refer to being an activist or activism and things like this with that kind of knowledge of it’s problematised, yeah”. Likewise, Portwood-Stacer (2013: 40) says ‘several interviewees remarked that they would identify as an anarchist or not depending on whom they were talking with’. Therefore, ‘the degree to which they claimed and performed an anarchist identity depended on the context in which they found themselves at any particular moment’ (2013: 40). The context-dependent and shifting nature of identity is reinforced; we also see this notion of a distinct activist community that holds an unspoken shared understanding of particular roles and identities, which we can conceptualise as an activist ‘doxa’ (in the vein of Bourdieu, 1992). This doxa consists of practices that are perceived to be ‘natural’ and are thus taken-for-granted within this context. It is worth noting that while unspoken assumptions, or ‘rules’ exist within the activist field, individuals also engage in reflexivity. We saw in the last chapter how reflexivity and critical thinking are perceived by some participants to be

a central feature of being (or becoming) an activist. However, similarly to how participants speak about the need to ‘check your privilege’, yet do not recognise some of their own privileges, this activist reflexivity exists only in certain contexts and about certain topics.

While it is the case that for several participants, this shared understanding of ‘activist’ enables them to claim the identity within some contexts, there are individuals who resolutely refuse the label. Some participants have personal issues with the term, including Hazel for whom the label of ‘activist’ evokes notions of men in left organisations who have sexually harassed women; she states that activist “means rapist” to her. She associates ‘activist’ with violent and aggressive macho behaviour which she does not wish to associate with. While Hazel’s reaction to the term activist is extreme, it reveals women’s concerns about sexism and suggests that ‘activist’ refers to the male body, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, for Hazel, the identity of “working class woman” takes precedence, demonstrating how individuals negotiate and prioritise various identities. Similarly, we have seen how Leonie struggles to reconcile the identities of ‘activist’ and ‘mother’ in the last chapter, despite both being defined by ‘caring’. Perhaps part of the conflict between these roles arises from the way in which one (mother) is seen as traditionally feminine whereas the other (activist) is implicitly masculine, given the criteria by which it is defined that I outlined in the last chapter and will explore further in this chapter.

Significantly, despite Hazel’s repulsed reaction to the label ‘activist’, within conversation she still speaks “as an activist” — implying that on some level she also accepts the shared definition and understanding of the term. Here, then, we see not only more evidence supporting the highly contested nature of the activist identity but also that identities are fluid, changeable, and contextually driven. Indeed, like ‘anarchist’ in Portwood-Stacer’s (2013: 37) study, ‘activist’ appears to be ‘a floating signifier, in that it means different things to different people in different

contexts'. As hinted at by Alex above, a key aspect of whether an individual claims the identity of 'activist' depends on who defines and gives the label. Cortese (2015: 224) reflects this, noting that individuals' responses to the question "are you an activist?" are situational and will change depending on who is asking, what they perceive the asker's likely conception of 'activist' is, and whether the individual wishes to be associated with or match that conception.

Furthermore, contestation over the activist identity does not take place solely within the activist field, but is influenced by other key players outside of this field and by one key player in particular — the media. Participants speak about public perceptions of activists being influenced by the media and overwhelmingly these perceptions are negative. Similarly to Hazel, but less extreme and for different reasons, Lily and Adrian recognise that 'activist' tends to be associated in the public imagination with violence, aggression, and the risk of arrest. These perceptions can act as barriers to individuals becoming involved in activism. It appears then that the rejection of the 'activist' label occurs either because participants personally hold negative connotations of the term (like Hazel) or because they are aware of the wider mainstream perceptions of 'activist' and wish to distance themselves from these connotations.

Another negative activist stereotype which participants speak of is that of the young person who has not yet "grown out of it", Charlotte says "it's seen as something that you do when you're a young person, a younger person". Similarly, Harry notes that:

I think people have got a very limited view of it [activism], I think when they hear the word activist that they think of tabard-wearing Oxfam clipboard users, that an activist is a gap year thing, that it's something that you do between the

ages of 18 and 21 if you're middle class and you don't have to work, and that it's something that you grow out of.

Here, we see the notion of the 'middle class activist type' again, along with the notion that the definition of 'activist' needs to be widened, particularly within the public consciousness. Indeed, Morris argues for the normalisation of protest, saying:

This is something that I did want to say, that's important. Because there is perhaps a perception that there's some sort of nutter who goes out and does this and we're some sort of strange weirdos. The people I know certainly aren't, they're well adjusted, ordinary, normal people from many walks of life. I can count civil servants, teachers, single mothers, unemployed people, family people, self-employed people, tradesmen, and professional people amongst us. And none of them, possibly apart from myself, are particularly eccentric or different. I think the big point that I wanted to get across is that a lot of people do things in their spare time. People might restore old cars, they might go to church, they might play sport, people do things in their spare time. And society that wants to preserve its status quo, has really said to go and protest in your spare time is the activity of cranks, you know? Go and play football! Go and do something else, go fishing, it doesn't matter, but don't protest. Normal people fish, normal people play football, normal people go to the gym, go for a run, cranks go and protest. Well, I'm sorry, but in a democratic society everybody should be, people should be protesting! It is, it is a, doing it in a non-violent way, I do stress, going and throwing bricks at the police isn't particularly helpful. But going and making a point, in a non-violent way, that you don't overly inconvenience people, is part of a vibrant democratic society. And to me it's no more

weird doing this than it is going sitting by the Trent and catching some fish. It's possibly a lot less anti-social than going out and getting absolutely hammered and having a fight.

Morris attempts to challenge common misconceptions about who does activism, as well as what being an 'activist' means. Notably, he stresses the need for "non-violent" action and compares it to other social activities, highlighting the social dimension of activism (as we saw in chapter 5). However, despite speaking positively about activism, Morris seems to imply that activism is, or at least is perceived to be, 'anti-social behaviour' by comparing it to other socially undesirable behaviours and remarking that it is "possibly a lot less anti-social" than these. Significantly, though, Morris' comment returns us to this notion that activism is something which anyone can and should do.

Unlike Morris, other participants imply that 'activist' is a special title which must be earned by doing the 'right' type and level of activism and which is to be awarded by someone else, rather than being a self-identification. Bobel (2007: 154) remarks '*hoping* that she [participant] is an activist suggests that the designation activist is bestowed upon an individual, like an award given for exceptional service'. Indeed, Dana demonstrates that the 'activist' label is a badge of honour to be awarded by others and a title which individuals take pride in, suggesting that it is a highly desired goal to strive towards:

I remember somebody when, just before I got involved properly with *No More Page 3* and I'd done a couple of the demos that was all and somebody tweeted me or included me in a tweet saying 'oh looking for local feminist activists' and they included me! And I thought, is that me?! I thought God, I suppose it is! Blimey, I'm a feminist activist, who knew!

This positive perception of the activist feeds into notions about the ideal perfect activist, who tirelessly works for the causes they believe in and fully commits their whole selves to doing activism. While this particular version of the activist receives high praise from participants, it also acts as a marker of the perceived standard required to claim the activist identity. By comparing themselves to this marker, participants reveal anxiety about whether they are “doing enough” to be deemed a ‘real’ activist. Bobel’s (2007: 154) participant demonstrates this:

I’d really like to think of myself as an activist, I hope that I am one. I’d be letting myself down if I weren’t. But at the same time, I think I have very high expectations of activists that I’m not living up to at the moment [...] I am wracked with guilt [...] because I don’t feel like I am dedicating enough of myself towards some form of activism.

Here we see this idea that being an activist is concerned with an individual’s sense of self, as seen in earlier chapters. We also see the negative emotional consequences of not living up to certain expectations of how much activism one should do, and, significantly, that these expectations are enforced by oneself rather than by others. These are all key points that I will explore further in the next section, which will focus on the ways in which the ideal perfect activist identity is defined by the level of activism one does, and the implications of this.

Doing the ‘right’ level of activism

We have seen so far that ‘activist’ is a complex identity which participants negotiate and, at times, resist. While it might be assumed (and we have seen this can be the case) that individuals who reject the activist identity will do so because of its negative connotations, it emerges that, often, it is actually because ‘activist’ is held in such high regard, and defined by distinctive criteria, that individuals do not accept the label. In this respect, participants do not consider themselves to be

activists because they do not “do enough” activism to deserve the ‘activist’ title. Stuart (2013: 108) notes that ‘both positive and negative stereotypes of activists or protestors have a potential to act as a barrier’ to activism. She (2013: 170) explains that ‘the more positive stereotype of the high level committed activist could function as a high-bar perceived requirement where some individuals may feel they fall short’. In fact, Bobel (2007: 154) contends that individuals’ ‘separation from the label “activist” is not an act of self-preservation. Unlike those invested in keeping undesirable indemnities at arm’s length, Lily [participant] *wants* to be included among those she admires’.

However, Bobel (2007: 150) also notes that conceptions of the ‘perfect standard’ of activism ‘effectively places the label “out of reach” for many social movement actors who deem themselves unworthy’ (2007: 150). Likewise, referring to the anarchist identity, one of Portwood-Stacer’s (2013: 38) participants remarks: “it’s a funny term because you feel like it’s an impossibility [...] You feel like there’s a bar that’s set really high and you can never really be that so why even bother identifying yourself that way”. Indeed, Stuart (2013: 105) notes how this focus on the ideal activist is demotivating as participants use it ‘to make relative judgements about their own identity or abilities. The implication is that when these self-judgements fall short, this may result in inaction or uncertainty about how to take action’. Therefore, such conceptions about the ‘right’ level of activism required to be an activist often act as a barrier to doing activism. Moreover, the key question arises of how much would be enough.

Bobel (2007: 153) observes that:

To duly earn the esteemed title of activist, you must put in your time and demonstrate your commitment [...] only those who ‘live the issue’, working very hard and at a great personal cost over a long period of time, merit the designation activist.

Bobel combines the notions of the ‘authentic activist’ who has the required lived experiences to legitimately claim the activist label and the ideal perfect standard of activist who does the ‘right’ level of activism to be considered a legitimate activist. She (2007: 154) suggests that to be a ‘true’ activist, one must not only have the relevant lived experiences but also put in the required level of ‘work’. Significantly:

It is not *only* the presence or absence of lived and present [...] experience that separates the ‘real’ activists from the rest of us; it is a set of values or standards beyond embodiment — standards that specify the amount of work an individual must produce. (2007: 154).

We have seen the tensions between these two conceptions of ‘activist’ in the last chapter. On the one hand, only those who possess innate characteristics and certain experiences qualify to be ‘true’ activists. While, on the other hand, if one does ‘enough’, is especially active, dedicated, and works hard enough for long enough, one can become an activist (according to the ‘ideal perfect’ definition which judges activists on the level of activism they do). Bobel reminds us that despite these contradictions, these two constructions are often combined to produce an overarching and definitive activist identity. Clearly, this sets the bar high for activists which not only contradicts the notion of activism being a universal and accessible activity but has repercussions for those who fall short of such definitions, as we shall see.

Moreover, Bobel’s (2007: 153- 154) conception of the true or ‘real’ activist raises a key question about who is defining and deciding on the ‘right’ level of commitment and work required to ‘merit the designation activist’. Possibly, there is a discrepancy between personal definitions of what constitutes ‘enough’ (and whether one is achieving it or not) and social definitions from other activists in the community. Significantly, participants are solely concerned with the social definition of activist,

lacking any notion of a personal definition of ‘enough’. Indeed, Portwood-Stacer (2013: 37) notes how movements cultivate ideas of the ‘proper or normative activist subject’ and how ‘individuals internalise these pictures, drawing on them in disciplining themselves, both consciously and unconsciously’. Likewise, Cortese (2015: 223) draws on ideas of the ‘looking glass self’ whereby ‘the self is the result of social processes where we learn to see ourselves as others see us, “who am I?” is responded to with “I am what I think you think I am”’. In this respect, individuals police and judge their own behaviour based on what they perceive other activists to think of them.

Furthermore, it seems that this self-policing results in harsher judgements than perhaps others would make. Despite being pleased to receive the ‘activist’ title, Dana implies that she had perhaps not yet done enough to earn it, stating “I’d done a couple of demos, that was all”. This suggests that individuals’ personal definitions of the activist identity follow stricter criteria regarding the ‘right’ level and type of activism than actually exists within the community. Likewise, Stuart (2013: 104) notes that ‘one pattern of occurrences was where the ideal person [activist] was described as quite extraordinary — highly capable, knowledgeable and skilled, but their [participants’] own self-description did not match this ideal’. However, it is important to remember how interactional personal and social constructions of ‘activist’ are, with each feeding into one another. Indeed, Portwood-Stacer (2013: 40) draws attention to the way in which identity performances are social, not just individual:

The labour of self-care may be experienced as the effort of an individual subject, but it always involves others who serve as witnesses, interlocutors, and supporters. This network of others is both real [...] and imagined, as when the discourse of “authentic anarchism” is activated in the mind of the individual.

Here, 'self-care' refers to Foucauldian ideas about reinforcing one's identity through daily actions, where lifestyle practices are not just about 'how to act but who to be' (Giddens, 1991: 81). Though Portwood-Stacer focuses on anarchist cultures, the same internalisation and self-policing is evident throughout participants' narratives. Crucially, as Stuart (2013: 98) contends, 'what others *really* think is not directly relevant, but rather the assumption made by the individual is'.

Critically, this constant self-policing creates anxiety for participants about whether they are "doing enough", resulting in feelings of guilt for not doing the 'right' level of the 'right' type of activism. Beth says "I don't do enough" and Dana feels guilty for not having the time to attend meetings for campaigns other than the one she is currently focussed on: "it's just there's quite a lot going on, you know?". Certainly, Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012: 52) assert that 'the imperative to act often gives rise to guilt feelings among activists. The interviewees for this study expressed that they felt guilty for not doing enough, with guilt propelling them into further action'. Whereas Jacobsson and Lindblom contend that these feelings of guilt encourage activists to be more active, I argue that this negative emotional impact often has the opposite effect of paralysing activists. Moreover, it becomes clear that this negative emotional impact is in fact gendered, bringing our attention back to the gendered barriers and exclusions to activism that exist.

'Women's guilt'?

While male activists acknowledge the culture of shaming and judgement that exists within anti-austerity activism, they do not speak about being personally affected by it. On the other hand, many women participants refer to guilt and the anxiety of not doing enough, appearing to be very troubled by this. Likewise, Kennelly (2014: 249) found that while both men and women comment on the intense expectations of activist cultures, 'it was women who appeared to take these expectations in and transform them into self-debasing emotions such as guilt or feeling

selfish'. Charlotte demonstrates this anxiety as well as reinforcing that it is for somebody else to decide what "enough" is and whether an individual deserves the title of 'activist'. She asks me "whether you think to just do a little bit is enough or whether you think people should do more, I don't know, because that's the thing that I think about". Notably, Charlotte suggests that activist is a label to be granted to individuals by somebody who has more authority than them. In this respect, identity works via the Althusian concept of 'interpellation' where a subject comes into being when hailed by someone who has authority (Webb et al, 2002: 9). Charlotte implies that I have the authority or expertise to decide what "counts" as activism given my role as researcher. This indicates that 'what counts' is relative to others' activities and that I have special access to this knowledge, suggesting that it is not something which is openly discussed in activist communities. Indeed, participants appeared to use the interview situation as an opportunity to freely discuss their anxieties about the activist identity and role. At one point Charlotte directly asks me "am I doing enough?" There is a sense, then, that participants are seeking not only guidance but also reassurance from someone qualified to give it, that what they are doing 'counts' as activism and is "enough".

It becomes clear that women participants in particular feel constant anxiety, doubt, and guilt about whether they are doing "enough" activism. While this was a central theme of most women's narratives, by comparison only one male participant referred to feeling guilty about how much he did, and this was at the very end of the interview as an after-thought. Though it could be argued that men may be less likely than women to speak openly about their emotions (and thus do feel the same as women but do not express it in the same way), this does not seem to be the case as they spoke openly about other emotions such as empathy and caring. This raises questions about the gendered nature of guilt and whether this is specific to activism or part of a wider issue of

‘women’s guilt’; indeed, Beth suggests that this guilt is just part of being a woman. Reinforcing this, Greer (2013) notes that women are socialised to feel guilty from a young age, drawing our attention to a recent Spanish study which discovered that women are more susceptible to guilt than men. Likewise, Bartky (1990) suggests that guilt is a deeply gendered phenomenon that occurs because of gendered structures and socialisation. Kennelly (2014: 243) contends that the repeated occurrence of guilt within women’s narratives says less about the individual women that are interviewed and more about the wider social and cultural contexts within which these women are positioned. It is important, then, that we consider the wider social and historical context.

Significantly, guilt is ‘inherently individualistic’ (Jacquet, 2015: 58); while shame is concerned with group norms and is used to hold individuals to the group standard, ‘guilt’s role is to hold individuals to their own standards’ (2015: 11). I have discussed how interlinked social and individual conceptions of identity are, indeed, Jacquet (2015: 51) notes that guilt occurs where ‘the [group] norm has been internalised and is self-enforcing’. Therefore, it is not so simple as to separate the two emotions and their causes; significantly though, guilt is a private and individual emotion which arises from and contributes to individuals’ self-policing. In fact, because of its individualistic nature, Benedict (2006) asserts that guilt is a distinctly Western emotion that emerges within a context that emphasises the individual and that its prevalence has recently risen. It is here that we see the influence of the current context of neoliberalism which fosters an environment of individualisation and responsabilisation. Individuals are perceived to be both capable and responsible for their own actions and success. If one should fail, this is interpreted as a *personal* failing, and the fault of the individual rather than any external or structural factors. Indeed, Kennelly (2014: 245) notes that neoliberalism is ‘a form of political governance that makes a merit out of individualism, flexibility, and forms of self-regulation that

decrease reliance on the state while increasing individuals' sense of responsibility for themselves'. While I discussed the ways in which such neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility are transformed by participants into positive motivations for activism in chapter 5, we see here the dark side of the internalisation of these values. As Kennelly (2014) asserts, women participants tend to blame themselves for not living up to the ideal perfect activist standard, perceiving it to be a personal failing and thus turning these negative emotions against themselves. Tying these feelings of guilt to the context of neoliberal responsibilisation, she (2014: 243) remarks: 'amongst the women, I noted professions of an overwhelming — at times even crippling — sense of responsibility and culpability'. Crucially, in order to feel guilty for failing to reach a benchmark, one must believe that such a benchmark is achievable and that it is entirely within one's own power to achieve it.

However, the key question arises of why this particular negative effect of neoliberal ideology is gendered, especially as we have seen the ways in which participants of both genders engage with the notion of individual responsibility. According to Kennelly (2014), there are two aspects to consider here. First is the gendered nature of responsibilisation discourses under neoliberalism, and second is the impact of the concurrent 'retraditionalisation' of gender norms. Kennelly (2014: 243) draws on post-feminist literature 'that posits women as the unwitting heirs to neoliberal responsibilisation' and argues that 'reflexivity under neoliberalisation needs to be understood as a gender-differentiated practice, with particular kinds of inducements to self-interrogation experienced by young women'. Indeed, Gill (2008) demonstrates that it is women more than men who are required to regulate themselves and work on the project of the self, thus making neoliberalism always already gendered. Women therefore experience more pressure to both change and govern their self (which is evident in the ways women are expected to continually attend to their physical image in order to fit social

conventions of attractiveness). Furthermore, Brown (2015: 105) draws attention to how “responsibilization” in the context of privatizing public goods uniquely penalizes women to the extent that they remain disproportionately responsible for those who cannot be responsible for themselves’. Thus, women are uniquely positioned under neoliberalism as responsible for both themselves and others, highlighting the contradictions present in neoliberal logic which assumes all individuals to be wholly independent and accountable, obscuring the reproductive labour that goes into sustaining an ‘independent’ individual, and which is usually carried out by women (Brown, 2015).

At the same time, Kennelly (2014: 243) follows feminist critiques of the ‘detraditionalisation’ thesis (Beck et al, 1994) which contends that traditional structures (such as gender) are becoming less relevant and visible. She (2014: 243) instead asserts that gender ‘has been *retraditionalised* under current neoliberal regimes’. Here, traditional gender norms and roles are reinforced, along with the binary between men and women, resulting in the restriction of women’s opportunities to participate politically. We saw in the last chapter how the traditional boundary between the private and public domains and their associations with women and men respectively are problematically being redrawn in the current context of austerity. Furthermore, despite both men and women expressing sentiments regarding the individual responsibility to ‘change the world’, it is ‘women who bear the burden of that “choice” as an overwhelming and impossible responsibility’ (Kennelly, 2014: 250). In fact, Greer (2013) contends that women are ‘loaded with responsibility for other’s behaviours’ since childhood. Therefore, women accept and place responsibility for social change on themselves but at the same time feel that ‘their efforts can never be enough’. In this respect, ‘guilt belongs to women under retraditionalised forms of gender in modernity’ (Kennelly, 2014: 246). We see, then, how guilt becomes a gendered emotion that is influenced by the cultural and structural context of the society within

which individuals are doing activism. Because of this, Kennelly (2014: 243) argues that guilt is a 'gendered structure of feeling', in the vein of Williams (1977).

Notably, the phenomenon of gendered guilt is not specific to anti-austerity activism but found in other political contexts too. Maddison (2007) discovered from interviews with young women involved in the Australian Cross Campus Women's Network (CCWN) that feelings of inadequacy were a common theme. She (2007: 402) remarks:

The pressure that some of these young women place on themselves is, at times, quite extraordinary. For example, Fiona feels that she is active on a personal level but feels guilty that she does not "do more" and "would like to be more active on a political level".

It appears that students are also influenced by the same sort of pressures and feelings that other women activists encounter. Interestingly, Fiona personally feels active but believes that her level of activism does not match social expectations, whereas my participants did not personally feel active 'enough'. However, Fiona still goes on to say she'd like to do more, implying that she is not entirely satisfied with her performance and demonstrating the negative emotional impacts of these doubts about the amount of activism one does.

While it has been suggested that young women in particular are affected by guilt because of their position as the 'ideal neoliberal subject' (as outlined in an earlier chapter and above), it emerges that this is not always the case. Indeed, the Women's Liberation and After in Nottingham (WOLAN) project, which collected interview data from women who are and/or had been active in the local women's movement over the past 50 years, reveals a similar attitude regarding women's feelings about their level of activity. Picot (2016: 18) remarks that:

Marion Davis who spearheaded [Women Against Violence Against Women] describes her mother who at 87 years of age still actively campaigns and is in the Jewish Women's Peace Group saying "her activism puts me to shame really".

Again, we see how women compare their own activities to others who are deemed to be exceptional. Picot notes that this activist modesty was a common theme in the WOLAN interviews, but interprets it as 'a collectivistic humble act of other's achievements over one's own' (2016: 18). While this assessment may be correct, I contend that there is also a gendered element here regarding women's socialisation to be less assertive regarding their successes (for fear it be considered arrogant and 'unwomanly'), as well as the element of gendered guilt which we have seen is present throughout my and Kennelly's (2014) data.

Remarkably, this gendered dimension of the negative emotions that result from self-policing is not recognised by participants. This is problematic as it obscures the presence of further gendered barriers and exclusions to social movements, with the result being that women are more likely to disengage from social movements. In fact, Coleman and Bassi (2011: 205) contend that by ignoring such internal power relations, resistance politics 'may shore up the status quo even as it undermines it'. Moreover, obscuring the structural causes of such gendered guilt leads to women blaming themselves for their perceived failure to live up to certain standards, believing that it is a *personal* failing. Indeed, Kennelly (2014: 250) contends that the collision between the retraditionalisation of gender norms and the responsabilisation of women under neoliberalism results in symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2003), where 'the internalised experience of pain or suffering that results from social conditions [...] is misrecognised by the subject as somehow of their own making'.

In fact, this gendered dimension and its effects are hidden not only from participants but from theorists as well. The revealing of gender within

Kennelly's research was slow and only occurred once she searched her interview transcripts for the word 'guilt'. Likewise, while I had paid attention to explicit gendered barriers and exclusions to activism, as well as discovering the presence of anxiety and guilt about the amount and type of activism individuals did, it was not until I returned to my interview transcripts with gender in mind regarding guilt, that I discovered that it was a distinctly gendered phenomenon. Furthermore, most of the literature that I have referred to regarding activists' experiences and in particular the ideal perfect activist identity does not approach the topic of gender (with the exception of Bobel (2007) who notes the gendered dimension of the perfect standard of activist, but again, links this to explicit gendered barriers of time constraints). Indeed, Coleman and Bassi (2011: 205) remark that the tendency for literature about social movements to focus on power in terms of 'counter-hegemonic' and 'bottom-up', 'obscures the ways in which power may be exercised *within* practices of resistance'. In response, Kuumba (2001) proposes using a 'gender lens' to incorporate the structure of gender into all elements of analysis of social movements as a way of making gendered differences and their implications more visible, an approach which I outlined in chapter 3 and have engaged with throughout the research process. Likewise, Einwohner et al (2000) contend that gender is an integral part of social movements rather than an outside addition, where 'social movements are gendered in their composition, tactics, identities and attributions'. However, there are clearly different layers of this gendered dimension, with some being more implicit than others, as Kennelly (2014: 242) notes, 'the very slowness of its [gender's] revelation is telling'.

So far, we have seen that considering the activist identity as a perfect ideal to strive towards is problematic because of the resulting feelings of anxiety and guilt that occur when one does not measure up to this standard. Indeed, Portwood-Stacer (2013: 42) notes how 'social discourses

of normativity also create a context in which one is always at risk of being judged and rejected when one's performances fail to measure up to cultural norms'. Therefore, within the activist field individuals feel constant pressure to either achieve or maintain perceived 'ideal activist' behaviours, which in the case of anti-austerity activism are interpreted in terms of the type and level of activism one does. Though this could encourage people to be active (as Jacobsson and Lindblom, 2012 suggest), it can also result in individuals undervaluing their contribution and clearly has a negative emotional impact on women especially. Indeed, one of Stuart's (2013: 156) participants remarks "I definitely come across a lot of super humans. It makes me feel inadequate".

Critically, as alluded to earlier, the question of "how much is enough?" remains forever hanging over the heads of participants, with the attainment of 'enough' perhaps always being just out of reach. This results in the constant pressure to "do more", while never feeling like one is "doing enough". Kennelly's (2014: 248) participant demonstrates this saying "I always feel that an expectation in activism is to be more involved to do more. To do more. To do more. To do more. You know?" Ironically, this attitude reflects the capitalist logic of perpetual accumulation, revealing the ways in which such ideologies are internalised even while one is attempting to resist them. Furthermore, the question is raised here of who's expectation it is to "do more"; in Kennelly's quotation, her participant attributes it to "activism", both reifying activism and removing responsibility from others for this attitude (though it is clear she has internalised these values). Similarly, Holyoak (2015: 133) notes that her participant, Katie, struggled with 'a persistent sense that she should do more [...] "I don't know if I should be doing more [...] I feel under pressure to do more which is my own pressure"'. Here, then, Katie is aware that the pressure is her own, but rather than recognising this as a widespread feeling that she has internalised, it appears that she blames herself for this pressure,

reinforcing Kennelly's (2014) argument about symbolic violence. This constant pressure to always "do more" has consequences, placing emotional, physical, and psychological strain on activists which can lead to 'activist burnout'. Indeed, another of Holyoak's (2015: 133) participants remarks "I've seen quite a lot of friends get quite burnt out once they get stuck on this idea that they have to be the activist hero who can do all the things!". It is these negative consequences, including burnout, that make up another element of the dark side of activism, to which I now turn.

Doing enough or doing too much? The negative effects of activism and activist burnout

Like participants, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 27) draw attention to the ways in which the 'perfect standard' of activist:

Can be deployed by some self-identified "activists" to police the boundaries of their social and political networks [...] one of us [researchers] has been accused by activist acquaintances of not having sacrificed enough to claim that identity [...] such accusations are loaded with an emotional impact (whether guilt, anger, despair or frustration) on those against whom they are levelled which in turn affect the individual's capacity to sustain activism.

Brown and Pickerill demonstrate how the activist identity is defined by the amount of work and dedication one puts in, as well as how this construction is enforced by activists through the practice of activist shaming (as discussed earlier). Moreover, and the key focus of this section, they highlight a central feature of the dark side of activism, namely, the emotional, psychological (and physical) strain of doing activism and the negative impacts of this on activists. Significantly, it is again those who are the most vulnerable and/or disadvantaged who are at the greatest risk.

Several participants speak about the detrimental effect activism has had on their health as well as its impact on other areas of their lives. Anna remarks “I think activism’s taken a very bad toll on my physical and mental health”. Likewise, Adrian says “it takes a toll personally” and remarks:

It’s like I think I can handle so I’m going to take it on board. And I think sometimes that has become over-bearing and I’ve had to take myself out of it because I can’t, and just not do anything for a while because it’s tiring.

We start to see the negative impacts of trying to meet expectations to do a certain level of activism, as well as one of the key consequences, namely that individuals withdraw from activism. Leonie remarks:

Things are a little bit different for me since then [since Notts Uncut started]. I am now a single parent, I have got some health issues as well and I don’t think that I can devote as much to it as I used to and to be honest I don’t feel that I want to devote quite as much to it as I used to. Not because it is not worthwhile but because it had such a massive impact on my life, most of it positive, some of it not. I don’t necessarily want to give that much of myself right away. Maybe at some point in the future but not right now, I am still kind of in recovery (laughs).

This statement in particular emphasises the personal strain of activism, with Leonie comparing activism to giving part of herself away, which requires a period of “recovery”. Graeber (2009: 252) contends that ‘[t]he trick to staying involved over the long term is to find a way to resist the temptation to overcommit. Relatively few, in my experience, successfully manage to do this’. For many participants, activism was a huge part of their lives but also an activity which they couldn’t always take part in

because of its all-encompassing nature. In response to looking through pictures of Uncut actions, Helen says:

I had a lovely megaphone, which I got for my 30th birthday, it was my special 30th birthday present, a big one and this part was red on it. It's indicative of where I am at the moment that it's broken and I haven't gotten it fixed. So it needs repairing.

Notably, the negative impacts of activism on Helen and Leonie's personal lives were partly related to their role as carers or mothers, highlighting gendered barriers to activism. Indeed, while male participants speak about the strains of activism and activist burnout, again, it is a more prominent theme throughout women participants' narratives. Like Leonie and Helen, Dana draws our attention to the all-encompassing nature of activism, remarking "it's [activism], you know, a big chunk of my life is taken up with this... probably as much of my life as my job does, if not more... it sort of infiltrates everything". Furthermore, Amanda notes that the constant "chipping away" at the system is "tiring" and can begin to feel "futile". Mel asserts that "people feel like they're endlessly, endlessly protesting" and warns that this leads to burnout. Indeed, Charlotte proclaims "you have to be careful, you don't want to get burnt out". Here, we see this notion of 'burnout' whereby activists push themselves too far, resulting in negative impacts on their health and the inability to do further activism. 'Burnout' has been studied since the 1970s as a condition that is mainly associated with workplace stress within the environment of person-centred occupations (Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993) but is a term that has become part of activist discourse. It becomes clear that a significant risk of the criterion of "doing enough" is that individuals might over-stretch themselves and do too much. Indeed, Kennelly (2014: 248) notes that the 'capacity to say no is often only achieved after reaching breaking point'.

In order to avoid such negative impacts, participants suggest that activists need to prioritise and “be careful not to spread yourself too thinly”; Alison and Anna speak of the need to choose an issue to focus on in order to be able to sustain their involvement. Anna states “I just thought (sighs) I need to, as a human being for my own sanity and well-being, I need to kind of focus on a few things”, drawing attention to the strains of activism on her personal life and health. Likewise, Martin notes how his partner chooses to focus on “single issues rather than the bigger stuff, the wider picture” because “the big stuff seems too much, too big, too like there is no way I can take on this”. However, this is problematic as it can result in individuals feeling that they do not live up to the criterion of “doing enough”. Indeed, Stuart (2013: 196) contends that ‘those highly committed to their movements can be equally troubled by not doing “enough” as they are by doing “too much”’. Furthermore, Bobel (2007: 155) notes that her participants speak about how “there’s a lot of pressure to be big, the stuff I do all feels so little”. Significantly, participants’ concern is not solely about the *level* of activism that they do but also the *type*, with ‘big’ activism tending to be associated with direct action. Holyoak’s (2015: 76) participant Ella demonstrates this: “people look at bigger things, like ‘let’s shut down this coal plant or this nuclear plant’”. This problematises the extent to which the individual ‘small actions’ which participants emphasise are perceived to actually ‘count’ as activism, casting doubt on participants’ earlier assertion that “doing what you can is all that matters”.

Moreover, activist burnout is detrimental not only to individuals but also to the activist community, given that it prevents key players from participating. Leonie suggests that the reason the local activist scene is currently quiet is because of the strains activism places on individuals and the resulting occurrence of burnout:

I think it needs somebody to say ‘right let’s do this, let’s get on with it’ and so far none of us are putting our heads out of the

parapet. I have got a feeling, I mean we have privately between individuals some discussions about right, we need to get back out there, we need to be doing something about this or something about that but we haven't actually done it yet and I think some of us are a little bit wary. I certainly am a little bit wary about getting caught up in it to the same degree as I was before because I just don't have the time or the energy.

The word 'parapet' has connotations of a defensive wall that protects soldiers, reflecting how activism tends to be described using masculinised metaphors of fighting, and drawing our attention to the link between direct action and visibility. Significantly, Leonie implies that in order to sustain involvement, it is vital that activists take "time off" to recover (perhaps becoming invisible to the activist community). Similarly, Cox (2009) draws attention to the need to consider the 'problem of personal sustainability in social movements', especially emotional sustainability, and to situate this within specific contexts. Indeed, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 28) assert:

Following a period of burn-out, social movement actors need to engage in reflection about their emotional needs and priorities before negotiating the terms of any potential re-engagement in activism; not least of all to minimise the reoccurrence of burn-out and to better balance activism with other demands on their time.

Amanda reinforces this:

Just on a personal level I needed some time off, my work is supporting women which can be futile, can feel futile, there's the activism which can feel futile, and sometimes you do, you get so tired, or I do anyway, get so like running on empty, you know? Can't keep hitting your head against a brick wall can

you, so I think you need time, on a personal level, I just need time off. Hang out with friends or hang out on my own just, ahh, a break from it all.

Similarly to Leonie and Amanda, Mary speaks of the need for “a bit of recovery before getting on with the next thing”. Stuart (2013: 155) reinforces this noting how ‘the theme of protecting oneself, or balancing demands, was stressed as necessary to avoid burnout — however balancing demands was also described as something that had to be learnt the hard way, through experience’, as in Leonie’s case.

Significantly, as we have seen in relation to guilt, burnout is perceived to be the outcome of an individual’s *personal* failing, thus placing the blame for and responsibility to avoid burnout on the individual. Brown and Pickerill (2009: 34) remark, ‘burn-out is still understood as an individual problem, that they [activists] have overstretched themselves’. Furthermore, like guilt, because it is perceived to be an individual problem there is also the sense that it is a private issue which, while acknowledged amongst activists, is rarely spoken about in terms of personal experience. Perhaps, on some level, an individual may feel ashamed about suffering from burnout because it implies that they are not good enough at being an activist and have therefore failed. The typical response to activist burnout is to disengage from activism and to leave the activist community for a time until one feels “strong enough” to return (implying that burning out is weak).

Yet, as Holyoak (2015: 131) asserts, ‘crucially, burnout does not result from individual failings of “over-sensitivity” but rather is a response to “situational stress”’. In this vein, Brown and Pickerill (2009: 34) switch the focus to the *situation* rather than the individual, asking the question: ‘how can we better understand why people suffer burn-out and how it can be “treated” as a collective failure of activist situations?’ Similarly, Cox (2009: 3) contends that we need to ‘view sustainability as both a

collective, political and an individual issue and problematic'. King (2005) emphasises the need for 'practices of emotional reflexivity' within activist spaces, whereby individuals 'check in' with how they are, monitoring themselves and others' emotional well-being in order to avoid anyone reaching the point of burnout. However, as Holyoak (2015: 134) points out, 'while seemingly effective, these practices remain ones that are undertaken at the individual level' which thus reinforces the 'sense of individualised responsibility for managing one's own emotional wellbeing'. Furthermore, there is the added risk that caring for others becomes an additional responsibility and burden, which is more likely to fall to women as the traditional carers and emotional labourers within movements (Holyoak, 2015: 134).

Moreover, the need for collective treatment of activist burn-out is problematic when part of the cause of such strains is the pressures which come from within the activist community. There is a need, then, to intervene before the stage of burn-out and to prevent contributing factors such as activist judgement and shaming. Participants emphasise fostering a supportive and inclusive activist environment; Mel speaks about the importance of receiving continued support from other activists, even when one is not actively engaged, and has created a Facebook group for this reason. In fact, Holyoak (2015: 134) asserts that 'what is required are collective responses to stress and trauma that are embedded within the very emotional culture of movements'. In order to avoid caring being tied to femininity and being interpreted as 'women's work', Holyoak (2015: 138) suggests that caring be reframed as solidarity. Here, she draws on work by feminists (Sevenhuijsen, 1998) regarding the 'ethic of care' and the need to emphasise 'interdependence' over independence. Holyoak (2015: 140) posits that this reflects 'a politicised understanding of care' that stresses the importance of emotional wellbeing and caring for sustaining social movements, in the hope that this will lead to the redefining of caring acts as those of activists rather

than women. Holyoak (2015: 142) contends that ‘in considering the interdependent relationships that facilitate activism, care becomes an act of solidarity in support of overall political goals rather than the individualised and devalued acts of women’. Moreover, such notions contrast with the neoliberal responsabilisation discourses that especially target young women (Holyoak, 2015: 140).

Similarly, Kennelly (2014: 244) draws on notions of ‘relational agency’ and ‘affective solidarity’ alongside the work of Arendt (1998) to assert that a ‘web of relations’, that perceives agency to reside in collectives rather than the liberal individual, ‘can enable political action through the capacity to share with others the burden of this otherwise individualised experience’ (2014: 253). Crucially, Kennelly is not referring to sharing the caring burden in the way that I referred to earlier as problematic, where women potentially will end up shouldering more responsibility, but in terms of fostering a space of communication where individuals can speak openly about their experiences and feelings. Here, then, Kennelly tackles the issue I raised earlier of guilt and burnout being perceived as not only individual problems, but also private ones which activists cannot speak openly about but must suffer with alone (usually by withdrawing from activism). Moreover, this ‘web of relations’ is reproduced by such acts of sharing experiences and serves to sustain solidarity and action, while also unburdening the individual. Indeed, she (2014: 254) remarks that:

In Suzie’s [participant] case, telling her story to others hooks her back into the web of relations, reducing her internalised sense of crippling responsibility and enabling her continued involvement in social movement organising. It is thus a political act in the Arendtian sense, creating the conditions of possibility for further action in the public sphere.

However, many participants speak about the need for a “break” from activism and, significantly, other activists. Anna speaks of having a non-activist partner:

I find it's a bit like my sanctuary actually. In some ways, it's nice to switch off once in a while. So it's nice that you can be upset and have a hug and cry and someone will comfort you without launching into a big debate with you, if that makes sense?

Likewise, Jared notes that while it is important to have friends:

On the same wavelength... it can be very intense to socialise with people with those, with the same sort of political interests because everything ends up a debate or intense discussion, even the jokes do as well.

Indeed, Dana emphasises the need for a break from activism saying:

The running helps... I think that's part of why I do the running I think because it just stops you, you tune out and tune into something else for a while, yourself and the actual world.

Dana implies that the activist “world” is separate from the “actual world” (reminding us of Bourdieu's (1992) conceptualisation of fields as little worlds) and that it is important to reconnect with this reality and stay grounded to prevent burnout. Similarly, Anna suggests that her partner and non-activist friends provide a “sanctuary” from the constant discussion within the activist community and that this escape is needed in order to sustain her involvement. Certainly, participants speak about the need to take time away to be replenished. While this may change if activist cultures were to transform themselves in relation to care and how burnout is understood, it is likely that the activist community and individuals' other parts of their lives would still constitute two separate spheres, or fields, between which individuals would still desire to move

at different times (as Dana demonstrates above). Perhaps these two 'worlds' would collide and merge if activism was redefined in terms of the mundane and quotidian, however, as we have seen, such understandings of 'activist' clash with the ideal perfect activist identity which participants construct.

Furthermore, Dana's comment about the "actual world" reveals the significance participants ascribe to tangibility, which is further revealed by the way participants stress the need to do something "hands on" and "practical" when they are feeling disillusioned with the activist community and the many arguments and in-fighting that occur. We begin to see a distinction being made between talking and doing with the latter being seen as more valuable. While this can be positive within the context of sustaining activists' involvement and providing a "break" from negative conversations within the community, there is also a darker side to this distinction where the divide between talking and action is used as a way of judging individuals' worth as activists. It is to the dark side of this dichotomy that I now turn.

Doing the 'right' type of activism: Talking versus doing

We have seen that participants feel judged by other activists for the level of activism that they do, resulting in gendered feelings of anxiety and guilt, echoed by the question "do I do enough?" We have also seen that individuals define activism as caring which implies that by not 'doing enough' women are not caring enough. Yet clearly this is not the case, indeed, we have seen that women perhaps care too much leading to such negative emotions and burnout. Therefore, it emerges that the ideal perfect activist identity is defined not by caring, but by *doing* (as suggested by the very question "am I *doing* enough?"). Moreover, emphasis is placed on doing the 'right' type of activism, with the 'right' type being direct action, which is constructed as the pinnacle of 'real' activism and defined in opposition to online activism, or so-called 'slacktivism'. Significantly, this emphasis on direct action prioritises

traditionally masculine behaviours, revealing a further implicit gendered barrier and exclusion to activism.

Charlotte demonstrates the intertwining of the 'right' level and type of activism. She feels that she is not active enough despite what she does because she has not done any 'big' direct actions:

I think I'm a lot more active than most people but I don't think I'm active enough, I don't in terms of, you know, I haven't gone and handcuffed myself to a power station or anything like that.

Likewise, Bobel's participants often perceive 'real' or 'true' activists to be those who 'take it to the streets' (2007: 155). In fact, Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012: 51) observe that 'the moral hierarchies within social movements are action-oriented: the status that the members are assigned depends on what they have done rather than thought or said'. Activists' symbolic capital, then, appears to be defined by action. Here, we see the emergence of a common theme within participants' narratives — the importance of *doing* something about the issues rather than merely talking. Helen notes:

There is a tendency among a lot of people involved in the left to do this kind of navel-gazing. There's a lot of factionalism, there's a lot of people arguing about which specific brand of social awareness is the one that you should be buying into. So you end up with organisations that either splinter or spend so much time talking about theory and tactics that they don't get a fat lot done.

UK Uncut is contrasted to other Left organisations which are criticised for being "talking shops" that place talking above action. In particular, participants criticise the People's Assembly (PA):

I don't see what they're doing, I can't see that they've made any difference. They've had a really good couple of meetings and had a couple of high profile authors and politicians speak, it's always nice to hear people speak... but they're not doing anything. They're not helping, on the ground... PA are just talking, they've been talking for a year so. (Hazel)

The problem is in terms of sheer organisation a lot of the meetings tend to be talking shops, they tend to talk about stuff that is wrong, then they don't talk about what they need to do to change it and they don't commit to doing it. (Owain)

Many participants assert the importance of doing something “practical” and highlight the embodied nature of such actions, speaking of being “hands on” and “actually going down with my feet, and doing stuff”. Mel suggests that rather than just talking, people need to “go off and do something practical instead”. Here the emphasis is placed on providing practical “on the ground” help that is relevant to people’s everyday lives. Participants criticise talking without action saying “don’t whinge, change it” and that “talking is too much hot air”. For Joe, doing something practical is central to how he defines activist: “someone who recognises that there is a need for political change and then doesn’t sit on their arse and do nothing about it. Someone who actively, yeah, someone who actively campaigns for change, hence the term activist”. Likewise, Alison states “I think it is also important to actually do something, apart from just talk about it”. Clearly, actions are placed above talking, with the sharp distinction that is drawn between the two suggesting that participants do not conceive of talking as a form of acting, but something entirely separate and even antithetical to doing.

In particular, participants emphasise “direct action” which is “[a]n action where you actually go out and *do* something, where you go out and let’s say shut down a shop, close a street” (Will). Wieck (cited in Ward, 2008:

34) demonstrates this distinction between talking and action in his analogy of indirect versus direct action:

If the butcher weighs one's meat with his thumb on the scale, one may complain about it and tell him he is a bandit who robs the poor, and if he persists and one does nothing else, this is *mere talk*; one may call the Department of Weights and Measures, and this is *indirect action*; or one may, talk failing, insist on weighing one's own meat, bring along a scale to check the butcher's weight, take one's business somewhere else, help open a co-operative store, and these are *direct actions*.

Here, autonomy is emphasised, suggesting that if someone is dissatisfied with something, they should take matters into their own hands, or as Ward (2008: 34) calls it, 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) politics, an idea that is central to many participants' narratives (as demonstrated in chapter 5). However, I have highlighted how this emphasis on individual agency within DIY politics conceals 'a very specific subject and a specific body: the white, male able-body' (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 216). In fact, this distinction between talking and doing relies on a binary that exists in relation to other binaries, namely, private/public and female/male, where the latter categories are privileged and the former (women, talking, and the private sphere) are perceived to be inferior.

Moreover, this emphasis on direct action privileges traditionally masculine ways of thinking and acting. Indeed, Coleman and Bassi (2011: 217) remark that 'despite its antagonistic nature, direct action seems to fall into the category of those masculine endeavours that help men shape the same ideal male body: fit, able, and hyper-masculine'. This is because direct action is often associated with traditionally masculine traits such as physical confrontation, toughness, and aggression and is spoken about in terms of 'the fight' and 'putting your body on the line'. Emphasising

these traits, Coleman and Bassi (2011) refer to this particular masculine performance as the 'Anarchist Action Man'. What's more, because of the way the language of direct action privileges 'conventionally masculinised metaphors of war and sport', it 'can be seen to bolster, rather than subvert, the order that it seeks to overthrow' (Sullivan, 2005: 9). Crucially, this discursive emphasis on metaphors of violence and competition, 'buttresses conventional and problematic "hegemonic masculinities" by valorising physical strength, machismo, emotional passivity and the necessity of competing to win' (Sullivan, 2005: 29). Moreover, it is perceived to be a moral (and therefore 'good' and worthy) performance, with emphasis being placed on 'self-sacrificing machismo' (Sullivan, 2005: 30). The consequences of this are that women and men who do not perform hegemonic masculinity are pushed out of spaces for political action. It is important to recognise that such constructions are damaging to men also because of the pressure to perform and fulfil expectations of a distinct type of masculinity; however, the focus of this thesis is on women's experiences of gendered barriers and exclusions to activism. Further, we have seen how women are more affected by negative aspects of the gendered nature of activism, such as guilt.

Highlighting the prominence given to masculinised direct action, Holyoak (2015: 84) comments:

Direct action was one of the areas where issues of gender segregation were most prominent in women's narratives of activist spaces and where they illuminated the differential status afforded to certain types of action [...] there is a perception of direct action and public 'stunts' as being a masculine domain occupied by a certain kind of (male) activist.

Unlike my participants, however, Holyoak's identified the gendered nature of this construction, and ascribed these differences in activist

behaviours to 'physicality' (2015: 83). Here, women activists remarked that the absence of women in certain campaigns was due to 'the physical confrontation that is often involved', with participants stating "I'm never going to be a street-fighter [...] it tends to be men at the front of the lines" (2015: 83). Again we see the use of masculinised metaphors of war, as well as the emphasis on the 'streets'. While this may seem innocuous, Connell (1987) draws attention to how historically 'the streets' are a place of intimidation for women, an idea that is reinforced by the need for feminist actions that 'reclaim the night' by marching in the streets. Moreover, Holyoak draws our attention to the ways in which this abstract ideal activist who does direct action is actually a male body (as suggested by Coleman and Bassi, 2011), by commenting on the ways in which women's bodies are conspicuous, 'bodies out of place' (Puwar, 2004) within direct action. Her participants sought to 'undo' and 'redo' gender in ways that minimised their femininity and incorporated traditionally masculine traits in order to pass unnoticed, and thus accepted, in spaces of direct action. Holyoak (2015: 97) notes that:

Women's success in being respected as credible and authentic activists often relies on nuanced and reflexive performances of gender. As Puwar identifies, 'located in an organisation based on a masculine performance, a fine balanced fusion of femininity and masculinity has to be enacted' [2004: 75].

Significantly, the women participants in Holyoak's study sought to affect others' perceptions of their competency by untying themselves from traditional perceptions of femininity as passive. Ella demonstrates this: "if you can be a tougher, tomboyish kind of woman then people will feel more comfortable with you doing some sort of hardcore direct action whereas if you come across as quite feminine they'll be more like 'oh well I don't know if you can do that'". The fact that they felt the need to do so demonstrates 'the extent to which women's bodies are always already conspicuous as the somatic other, a body out of place in spaces of

physical activism where the masculine body is the norm (Puwar, 2004)' (Holyoak, 2015: 101).

Critically, the gendered nature of the ideal perfect activist who does the 'right' type of activism (direct action), is not only obscured, but afforded the subtle authority of 'his mode of interaction and physical embodiment [being] definitive of the authentic activist' (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 218). Therefore, the ideal perfect activist identity is implicitly and inherently gendered, but accepted as a universal abstract body because of the ways it is inscribed within activist cultures. In this respect, activist cultures reflect the wider societal doxa of 'masculine domination', highlighted by Bourdieu (2001), where masculine forms of thinking and behaving are afforded a higher status with this status being taken for granted as 'natural' because of how embedded and inscribed in our daily activities and discourses it is. Indeed, Butler (1999: 178) demonstrates how 'particular subjects and modes of behaviour are produced as normal and natural through the masking of power relations, as social practices re-enact, cite and re-iterate a set of meanings already established' (cited in Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 207). Moreover, Sullivan (2005: 31) draws attention to the ways in which negative emotions such as guilt help to reinforce and reproduce such meanings as naturalised within specific fields (though she does not recognise the gendered dimension of guilt here): 'by being driven in part by an individualistic assuaging of activist guilt, it can contribute to a competitive and conservative *habitus* oriented towards visibly "doing something" and attracting attention for this'. Emphasising the masculine dimensions of this, she refers elsewhere (2005: 31) to the 'hardcore *habitus*' of activist cultures obsessed with direct action.

Significantly, Sullivan also highlights the importance of visibility here, with concern being not only about doing something, but about being witnessed doing it. This reminds us of earlier discussions about the activist identity, and how it needs to be interpellated by somebody else

with authority 'hailing' that person, with this moment of hailing simultaneously bringing the individual into being. Furthermore, it raises questions about the *invisibility* of women's actions in comparison to the visibility of the Anarchist Action Man doing direct action. Indeed, McAdam (1992) asserts that women are more likely to take on 'behind-the-scenes' roles. Moreover, Thorne (1975) demonstrates how such work is given less value and authority, terming it the 'shitwork' of movements. Holyoak (2015: 82) remarks that:

In addition to men's domination of physical and verbal space, the persistence of horizontal gender segregation within activist groups is visible in the predominance of women in backstage movement support roles such as facilitating meetings and organising gatherings.

Notably, such work is 'all too often overshadowed by men's more public actions' (Holyoak, 2015: 82). A clear divide is drawn between what is deemed to be 'proper activism' — direct action, and other less valued and perceived to be less 'real' types of activism, which I will now explore further in terms of online and offline activism.

The 'real' and the 'virtual': Online versus offline activism

Participants draw a sharp distinction between online and offline political activism, often defining the two dimensions in opposition to each other, referring to online as "armchair" or "soft" activism and offline as "direct action" which involves "actually *doing* something". Again, the distinction is made between talking and action, with participants contrasting the virtual to the "real" and suggesting that offline action is a more valid and legitimate form of activism. This hierarchy of activism is demonstrated by the very language used to describe online activism, with words such as 'slacktivism' and 'soft' (as opposed to hard) denoting online activism's lower position. Indeed, Henry remarks that "slacktivism is a sub-category of activism". Notably, online activism is perceived to be less worthy than

offline activism; Halupka (2014: 117) notes how the terms slacktivism and clicktivism are used 'as an insult, to criticize what they [Morozov, 2009 and White, 2010] see as an inferior mode of participation'.

In contrast, participants refer to offline action as "actual", "real", and "actually physically going out". Adrian speaks about how most of his anti-austerity activism is online and contrasts this to times when he offers "physical support". He suggests that the tangibility of offline spaces and actions is significant, a theme echoed by other participants who emphasise creating protests around the tangible:

I think it's simple. I think people can get it. And they had something physical to look at and deal with as well, they had somebody's shop which they could stand against, which they could say was a... was the force they were acting against. I think that's something people lack in a modern society is that the structures of power are kind of opaque, so you sort of know what the government's responsible for but you can't really get at them, and a lot of the rest of it happens, you say well it's international banking well what can you do to international banking? Or the exploitation that you're angry about might be the exploitation of somebody who's in another continent because those jobs have been moved out of your community, so you don't witness it every day. So you don't have many opportunities to stand next to the thing that you're cross with and shout at it and I think that having people's physical shops to do that to, made the issue more kind of understandable and concrete. (Helen)

Amin reinforces this, arguing that translating abstract concepts (such as justice and equality) into concrete, tangible issues and targets is particularly important in a postmodern context rife with uncertainty. There is perhaps a latent concern here about visibility, with offline

tangible actions being more visible compared to potentially anonymous and less visible online activities.

For participants, a key strength of offline activism is how it helps to build relationships between activists, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. Henry asserts that relationships are easier to build face to face because “it comes down to what’s called common grounds which is being able to create mutual discourse with someone and a shared understanding of things”. Likewise, Jack says “there is a level of trust that’s built up” through “real-world shared struggles”. Participants reflect critics’ concerns that so-called ‘slacktivism’ is ineffective because of how social media forms ‘weak ties’ between people rather than the ‘strong ties’ that are required for activism (Gladwell, 2010). In this respect, social media produces bridging social capital, ‘which is characterised by weaker, but more widely diffused networks of reciprocity’ rather than bonding social capital which concerns deeper relationships within groups that provide ‘necessary social and psychological support and a sense of belonging’ (Skoric, 2009: 417). Certainly, while Beth claims that Facebook “makes it quite an intimate friendship in a way... you almost feel like you’re living their life, with them”, she immediately contends that it is important to have “the physical meet-ups” because that is when “people are made real and that you actually get to know them”. Again, we see this distinction drawn between the virtual and ‘real’ with the latter being seen as more authentic and thus better than the former.

Indeed, a key criticism of online activism is that it is not ‘real’ activism, as Gladwell (2010) remarks when comparing the current context of social media activism with the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S: ‘we seem to have forgotten what real activism is’. Crucially, for Gladwell (2010), such ‘real’ activism is defined by risk, and is ‘not for the faint of heart’. Again, we see the idea that ‘proper’ activism is dangerous and requires an extraordinary individual to be able to carry it out. This is problematic as it again puts up barriers to who can do activism and be an activist,

privileging an implicitly masculine version of activism where 'real' activism is risky, tough, and concerned with fighting long and hard for one's cause. Halupka (2014: 117) remarks that a line is definitively drawn between 'meaningful engagement and unsubstantial engagement, a line that holds that political change must be hard-fought'. Reinforcing this, Morozov (2009: 185) suggests that meaningful activism must be risky, authentic, and demonstrate a deep commitment. Here we see the combination of authenticity with the criteria of doing the 'right' level and type of activism, thus producing even higher standards for earning the 'activist' title. Reinforcing the notion that direct activism is tougher and because of this more noble, Beth suggests that online activism is often perceived to be "cowardly" as it is not directly confronting the problems and people who are causing them.

Participants' narratives reflect the denigration of online activism in relation to offline, 'real' activism. Jared says that he cannot be called an activist because he "only" does online activities which do not count as "real activism". Similarly, Anna says that she is "only the clicktivist, I have to say", suggesting that to be a 'real' activist one must participate in direct action. Significantly, Anna was unsure about whether she fulfilled the criteria to be interviewed about activism because of her recent focus on online participation, despite having been involved in many forms of activism throughout her life (which emerged during the interview). This raises key questions concerning who can legitimately call themselves an activist and whether online activism 'counts', in the eyes of participants. Beth remarks:

I get a bit frustrated because I have felt a little bit sometimes like some people in the group, I won't name any names, say enough of this talking we need more action and so on, and I think well... when am I going to have time to do the action? It's, because I'm not attending these meetings mean that what I think isn't valid?

We again see this idea that some types and levels of action are perceived to be more “valid” than others, leaving those who cannot participate feeling guilty and frustrated. In fact, the distinction drawn between online and offline activism, with the latter being deemed to be more valid and authentic is deeply problematic as it creates further barriers for those who are already restricted from doing activism.

Participants therefore perceive online activism to be less ‘real’, less effective, and less authentic than offline activism. What’s more, online activism is conceived of as a threat to traditional forms of political engagement. In this respect, participants and critics of so-called ‘slacktivism’ worry that individuals will substitute their offline activism with online activities because they are less costly but still provide satisfaction. Indeed, Adrian asserts that the problem with social media is people becoming armchair activists and “just sticking behind a computer and believing that is the only way to change the world”. Similarly, Jared contends that the difference between online and offline activism is being “active versus passive” and links this to the contemporary “lazy” consumer culture that he and other participants believe we currently live in. Owain refers to “the sapping effect” that social media has and Jared contends “it [social media] makes us do things in a different way, we often do things with our fingertips rather than our feet and our voices”. Notably, Jared says that social media *makes* us act in certain ways, reifying the technology and suggesting that it has a power of its own. He also demonstrates the crux of this ‘substitution thesis’ — that people do things online *instead* of offline. Like Owain and Jared, Morozov (2009) dismisses ‘slacktivism’ as ‘the ideal form of activism for a lazy generation’ who do not want ‘to get their hands dirty’ (Christensen, 2011). Slacktivism is perceived to be easy and despite being ineffective (according to critics), it still alleviates the guilt that individuals feel for not participating politically and fulfilling the duties of active citizenship

(Morozov, 2009). In fact, Morozov (2009: 190) asserts that digital activism ‘provides too many easy ways out’.

Notably, this disparaging of so-called ‘slacktivism’ for being ‘easy’ and ‘lazy’ reveals an underlying concern about how the activist identity is defined, with individuals appearing protective of the title. Henry demonstrates this, stating “It’s too easy for people to say they’re an activist now”. We are reminded of how the activist identity is seen as a title to be earned, with the implication being that those who do online activism do not *deserve* to have the honour of the activist label. Dermot demonstrates this point, admitting that he personally finds it frustrating when people “only” do online activism given that he is doing direct action and putting himself at risk when they are not. Again, ‘real’ activism is equated with risky activism. Ironically, there are echoes here of a current dominant discourse which anti-austerity activism attempts to challenge — that of ‘strivers versus skivers’ (Valentine and Harris, 2014). This discourse repackages the historic ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor distinction within the context of neoliberalism and austerity. Here, strivers are seen as hard-working, moral, and good people who deserve the fruits of their labours and are pitted against those who are not deemed to work hard enough or be worthy of any ‘benefit’. In relation to activism, it seems that so-called ‘armchair activists’ are perceived to be the lazy individuals who are unworthy of the ‘activist’ title in comparison to those who are working hard doing dangerous and ‘real’ direct action. Clearly, this is problematic, especially when we consider the ways in which online activism is often done by more vulnerable individuals for whom direct action is inaccessible. Contradictorily, such attitudes reinforce the dominant discourses surrounding austerity which these same activists are seeking to undermine. However, Dermot is aware that such concerns about who receives the activist title are “irrational and childish”, concerned with “getting credit” for the activism which one does. Again, then, we see the

influence of the ego and individual interests in doing activism, as well as the importance of the visibility of actions, with the need for individuals to be witnessed doing direct action in order to feel vindicated.

Further, we need to carefully consider how online and offline forms of activism interact, rather than merely dismissing the former as 'slacktivism'. Gladwell (2010) emphasises how 'real' activism involves boycotts and nonviolent confrontations, but forgets the fact that nowadays, as is the case with UK Uncut, these are often organised and coordinated online. Therefore, while participants and theorists may construct online and offline activism in opposition to one another, we need to consider the interaction between the two forms of activism and realise that online activism constitutes *another* form of activism which should not be assessed according to the criteria of offline activism. Gerbaudo (2012: 2) demonstrates the need to move beyond the sharp divide often drawn between online and offline spaces in his book that explores the 'intersection of "tweets and the streets", of mediated communication and physical gatherings in public spaces'. Similarly, participants speak about online and offline activism in terms of a feedback loop, with each propelling and reinforcing the other. Though Dana still draws the distinction between 'real physical' activism and social media activism, she demonstrates how the two interlink:

Now it's a whole lot easier for people to shout because of social media and it has such a bigger resonance because it sort of feeds itself if you know what I mean, so it will start on social media and then it will become a real physical thing and then that will resonate through social media and it's so easy to get a message out and about really quickly.

Moreover, we need to recognise that online activism involves more than merely changing one's Facebook profile picture; it includes signing petitions, organising events offline, discussions, group formation, and

the sustaining of individuals' activities offline, as we shall see throughout the rest of this chapter.

It becomes clear that we need to carefully consider the purpose of online activism as well as critically reconsider how we define 'success' within this context. Schumann and Klein (2015: 316) remark that 'what is belittled as lacking commitment seems to be considered by group members as a meaningful action in itself, holding the same quality that is central to traditional, offline collective actions: they advance the group's purpose'. Gerbaudo (2012: 14) contends that online activism 'entails the *symbolic* construction of a *sense of togetherness*' and generates affect amongst groups. Crucially, there is no robust evidence that confirms the substitution thesis, meaning that while individuals involved online will not necessarily become involved offline, they also do not replace offline activism with so-called 'slacktivism'. Indeed, it may be the case that online activism provides opportunities for individuals to become active in a way that they would never have otherwise been. Dana demonstrates this:

Murdoch tweeted in response to a tweet from a woman who had only joined Twitter the week before, and she was just some woman at home and we decided that day to get everyone tweeting Rupert Murdoch and he replied to her tweet and we got goodness knows how many tens of thousands extra signatures on the back of that, and obviously, our whole petition is online and everything so.

Dana suggests that social media gives individuals a voice because the speed and ease of platforms such as Twitter enable participants to fit activism around their daily routines. In particular, she draws our attention to how such opportunities presented by social media may help to overcome gendered barriers to activism, which I will now explore further.

Overcoming gendered barriers: Social media

Hazel demonstrates that social media can help to overcome time pressures associated with caring responsibilities and the subsequent difficulty of attending meetings:

So, a lot of women don't have access to the Internet at home because they can't afford broadband, but most people have mobile phones so when your children are in bed at 8, 9 pm, you're at home, by yourself. So you'll clean your house, you may make some meals so that all the work's done for tomorrow, but you'll not necessarily want to go straight to sleep so you'll have the time to read or to think or to do something. And if it's stuff that people can do on Facebook, on Twitter, through their phones then they're more likely to get involved than if they have to physically attend a meeting when they're supposed to be putting their kids in bed.

Notably, there is a class element here with Hazel speaking about women who cannot afford broadband. Like Hazel, Charlotte says "why I think it's [social media] great because like, you can lie in bed breast-feeding and look at stuff on Facebook". In fact, Beth speaks about her friend setting up a now large Facebook group for local feminists: "So it's like, techno-grassroots in that sense (laughs), it was just like she made it probably like feeding Mika in one hand and like, at 5 o'clock in the morning or something, he was new-born so, (laughs)". It appears, then, that social media is a way to combine caring and activism, enabling women to do both at the same time and reducing the time costs of activism that act as a barrier to participation. However, Charlotte also goes on to say "but yeah I would like to do a bit more sort of active", hinting at a distinction between online and offline action and suggesting that the latter is more "active" and perhaps preferable. Similarly, Beth comments "I guess the problem is that, well the question to me is does online activism, in the long run will it change like gender norms? And so far, I think it will, and

it can do, but not without the physical activism as well”. Beth suggests that there needs to be an interaction between online and offline activism, as I discussed earlier.

Moreover, participants suggest that social media is a medium that erases ‘informal impediments’ which prevent less privileged individuals from having a voice in the public sphere by affording the anonymity and distance to speak openly and freely (Fraser, 1992). Beth says that “social divisions get a little bit blurred with social media in a way that I think’s great” and speaks of technology being “a great leveller”. Likewise, Skoric (2009: 418) asserts that ‘textual communication via the Internet strips away the standard visual and aural cues of social identity — e.g. gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status — and helps to promote heterogeneity’. Hazel reinforces this, contending that social media acts as:

[T]hat bridge between people who don’t have resources and people who do have resources and everybody’s more equal. Because on the Internet you don’t know how skint somebody is, if they’ve managed to get access to the Internet, for that time, they’re on an equal footing with you.

We are reminded of Habermas’ (1989) original ideal of the public sphere where inequalities are ‘bracketed’, creating open debate between people with statuses removed so that the emphasis is on the content of the argument, rather than the speaker. However, before jumping too quickly into a romanticised notion of the Internet as an ideal public sphere, we should remember that the use of technology creates new exclusions, particularly for those without experience of or access to technology. Hazel states that “we need to become more welcoming of the Internet without leaving older activists behind”. Helen draws our attention to the potential exclusion of groups that do not have the skills or technology required to remain in the loop:

You must be careful about who you're excluding through doing that. Particularly with NHS things quite a lot of people who get involved are older people who might not necessarily be Internet users... groups of young people who don't have access to the Internet and the way that they're digitally marginalised do they call them? Or digitally deprived? So those same groups of people aren't getting this access necessarily.

As Castells (1996) contends, we now live in a world where information and access to it are the new and highly valued form of capital, where a key divide is between the 'information-rich' and 'information-poor'. Jack demonstrates how the use of technology can be exclusive, recalling a time when:

They sort of done a Twitter meeting where you were supposed to use a hashtag and, but for whatever reason, I don't know, my computer at the time just wasn't fast enough, and I thought so that's me out, I can't engage in this discussion because my computer isn't quite up to it.

Furthermore, status and inequalities are not entirely 'bracketed' on social media sites like Facebook where users' names are visible and assumptions about their gender are likely to be made. Alison highlights gendered risks to participating politically online, saying women are sometimes the recipients of "negative attention. They get rape threats, that kind of stuff, so it's a double-edged sword, isn't it?" Beard (2014) asserts that where women do speak out, they are punished for doing so, reinforcing the traditional boundaries between the masculine public and feminine private spheres. Therefore, social media does not necessarily erase offline divides; in fact, Loader and Mercea (2012) claim that offline divides in political participation are reproduced and reinforced online. Indeed, the very qualities that make the Internet so appealing —

temporal, spatial, and emotional distance and anonymity — can also be used negatively by individuals to create new barriers. Mel highlights this by speaking about the issue of online “trolls” who deliberately attack individuals. Here, we see another negative consequence of online spaces not being considered to be ‘real’ – individuals feel less inhibited as there is no fear of consequences and there is distance between the attacker and those they are attacking. However, while on the surface there may appear to be an emotional distance from what is said online, in reality, this is not necessarily the case and words written online can often have damaging effects on individuals:

Words slung carelessly at each other can be violent and oppressive — not just to the recipients, but to some onlookers too, until the atmosphere becomes so toxic that those of us who are sensitive cannot breathe in it and we start to entertain serious thoughts of giving up activism, leaving the Internet (Hope, 2014).

Hope draws attention to how social media can reinforce and even heighten barriers and exclusions rather than overcome them.

Social media: Heightening barriers?

Some participants suggest that social media increases the divide between activists and non-activists by perpetuating the “activist bubble”. Morris acknowledges that social media is “certainly a very good tool, we use social media a lot, we communicate ourselves on it” but points out:

Don’t you ever notice that we’ve got our own little bubble? You know, we talk to the political people, they talk to us, we all exist within that little bubble. If social media is going to become an effective tool we’ve got to get out of that bubble.

Similarly, Lydia suggests that groups exist within their own bubbles online and that non-activists are unlikely to be mobilised online:

If I wasn't interested in sort of politics, left wing politics and that sort of thing, I would be able to just completely ignore it. It wouldn't even sort of come up and it wouldn't even show up on my radar... so it's useful if you already have an interest in something.

Joe reinforces this: "people tend to follow sources of information on Facebook which they already want to, so they're not going to have their belief system challenged". Here, then, we see this notion that the Internet merely produces radical enclaves rather than wider public debate. In this respect, social media is perceived to contribute to the fragmentation of civil society 'with public spheres veering toward disparate islands of political communication' (Dahlgren, 2005: 152). Indeed, Habermas' main criticism of the Internet is that the publics produced by it 'remain closed off from one another like global villages' (1998: 120-1). Further, Sunstein (2001: 16) contends that such fragmentation can lead to more dangerous 'group polarization' where people encounter less diverging opinions and instead remain within their own corners of the net 'listening to louder echoes of their own voices'.

Conversely, other participants challenge this assumption as well as the notion that so-called "keyboard warriors" are ineffective, asserting that social media does have scope to reach wider audiences. Alison says:

I guess they are pretty savvy on social media, which I think I, you know people kind of laugh about keyboard warriors and stuff but you reach a lot of people. I think it is a really good change as well from when I was younger because you didn't have that power to reach people.

Like Alison, Dermot questions the disparaging of "keyboard warriors", claiming that although they are sneered at, they actually play an important role: "people do underestimate this sort of, people: 'oh, you, you're just a keyboard warrior', somebody's got to spread the ideas". He

contends that while previously, ideas were spread using books, “we now live in the Internet age so why not do it through the Internet as well?” and draws comparisons to popular political thinkers and writers such as Orwell and Chomsky:

Well he [Orwell] wasn't that active really, the reason people like him, and I like him is because of the ideas he spread... people absolutely love Noam Chomsky, and I do, I think he's brilliant. But he's not out there doing things, he's speaking and writing. And so how is it any different to me sitting at home doing that on the Internet, it's a different audience and it's elitism... it's okay for him to do it 'cause he's an intellectual white man but not when other people do it.

Dermot draws our attention back to issues of privilege and the notion that only certain people are in a position to speak and be heard within the public sphere. He also implies that online writings are perceived to be inferior to published books, reminding us of the distinction that is often drawn between 'high' and 'low' culture. Notably, though, despite claiming the significance of people spreading ideas, Dermot still defines and separates this from “action” and being “active” by separating 'doing' from speaking and writing. This position mirrors traditional Marxist theory concerning the distinction between 'base' and 'superstructure', where the former is concerned with the modes of production and the latter concerns culture. In this formulation, the superstructure can influence the base but ultimately the base determines the superstructure and predominates. Butler (1998) questions this materialist Marxism and especially the resulting backlash against the cultural, contending that the concerns of so-called 'new' social movements are not 'merely cultural', and should not be dismissed.

Certainly, Anna demonstrates how Facebook has helped her to politicise others and reach those who would not otherwise be concerned with

politics: “I believe Facebook is my propaganda channel, so I say. And it works!” She speaks about how her friends have become politicised by reading and commenting on her Facebook posts and articles that she shares. Similarly, Charlotte speaks of how the Internet has helped to spread information and make political issues more understandable through the use of graphics and videos that simply explain situations such as the Israel/Palestine conflict. Beth also speaks of translating facts and figures into “bite-size, Facebook friendly” pieces that can be shared to friends and family to increase their knowledge and understanding of politics. Moreover, Dana asserts that it is easier to read articles and blogs online compared to finding time to read books, again demonstrating how the Internet makes activism more accessible by overcoming the time costs associated with it. Charlotte says:

I think that’s the thing, people can in the privacy of their own home, in their own time, read things that they might not have read otherwise because it wouldn’t be in the kind of newspaper that they would pick up, so I think it is really useful and also, obviously there’s the tweeting and just the fact that you can sign a petition in seconds, I think it’s a really powerful thing.

Several participants suggest that social media is a way to involve individuals who do not or cannot usually do activism and has the ability to cross barriers and divides between people, making activism more inclusive and representative of vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups. Beth suggests “that’s the role that it has played for me, putting me in touch with people with very diverse backgrounds and experiences... that kind of access to people, and their life, I don’t think we’ve ever had that before”. Likewise, Rifkin (2009: 551) remarks that the exposure to diverse people that the Internet enables results in an ‘empathic surge’. In fact, Alison contends that while the media has traditionally been owned by the “ruling classes”, “now they don’t have

that control so I think that makes a massive difference because people do get their voices heard and real minorities get their voices heard and do end up having that kind of influence and power". Mel reinforces this saying how despite her disability "I can still be an activist, I can be an armchair activist because I'm a laptop activist". The term "armchair activist" implies that those who engage mainly online are a different type of activist; significantly, Mel sees this as empowering rather than derogatory, which is how many participants use the term. Similarly, for several women participants, the Internet acts as a way of claiming a voice and feeling that they are "doing something rather than nothing". Anna and Amanda speak of being a "clicktivist" and how signing petitions makes them feel that they have a voice, even if their campaigns are ineffective:

I'm a bit of a clicktivist... I spend a lot of time signing petitions, lots of them. No, I don't think petitions make any difference, I think that just makes me feel like at least I get counted as disagreeing with something. (Anna)

Likewise, Charlotte remarks "I think it's [social media] changed activism and made people feel more able to do something", drawing our attention to the ways in which being active online can empower individuals. While participants acknowledge that online actions may not impact upon policy, they ascribe other value to them. Indeed, Halupka (2014: 117) asserts that disregarding political acts because they are different to traditionally held ideas about what constitutes activism is a mistake. For even if it requires limited effort, online activism has relevance for the individual.

Moreover, Dana suggests that social media is a way of seeing "around" mainstream media and is in some ways more truthful and honest, providing the potential for people to become enlightened, empowered, and to mobilise:

It could potentially be the basis of a revolution, perhaps not a revolution with, you know, guillotines and stuff but a revolution that sees people taking the red pill instead of the blue pill, not just in terms of feminism but in terms of oh my god, these people have been getting away with this shit for years! How did we let this happen?! And that comes from reading things outside of mainstream.

Here, Dana is referring to the film 'The Matrix', and the protagonist's choice to take either a pill that would reveal the 'truth' and reality, or a pill that would allow him to remain in ignorance about the real world. Significantly, this analogy implies that individuals have a choice and alludes to ideas of 'reality' versus a false consciousness, which, in Dana's eyes, social media and activism can help to free individuals from. Also relevant here, is the fact that the 'red pill' is presented as the choice to embrace the often painful truth of reality, whereas the blue pill reflects blissful ignorance. Therefore, we get a sense that to choose to be a part of Dana's 'revolution' is not necessarily the easy or comfortable choice to make, reflecting the strains that activism places on individuals. While it is not the easy choice, it is implied that it is the 'right' choice, morally, highlighting the centrality of morality throughout participants' narratives, especially in terms of motivations for doing activism.

Reinforcing Dana's and other participants' assertion that social media has radically changed the political landscape, Mel suggests that we are now living in the "Facebook generation" and speaks about activism in terms of "before" and "after" Facebook. She contends that social media has transformed activism with events being organised and publicised online and people networking through social media. She compares this to "before Facebook" when people would meet at protests and face to face meetings and find out about events via leaflets. Likewise, Dana speaks of "before" and "after" social media in activism saying how now you can be involved in activism by sending "one or two tweets while

sitting having your sandwich at lunch time”, emphasising the way that social media makes activism accessible by fitting it into people’s routines. She goes on to note that “in the past you’d have had to put posters up or done a letter writing campaign, goodness knows how long it would have taken and things happen in like hours now”. Jack summarises: “the cost of organising things has plummeted, the time cost, the money cost, the effort cost, it’s just, it’s gone”. Mary remarks:

You can use social media without doing... you can use it by setting up groups or coordinating and organising things in a very quick way because you know that everybody is always on. You just send somebody a message and they will pick it up.

However, while many participants perceive the ubiquity of social media to be a positive attribute, others recognise that there is a ‘dark side’ to this also. Dana remarks that social media:

sort of infiltrates everything because it’s all, a lot of it’s social — you know, online activism, it goes with you everywhere in your pocket doesn’t it (picks up mobile phone) so, I’m never away from it, quite literally never away from it.

Significantly, she highlights the potential risk of this and the psychological strain activism places on people noting that it’s “probably really bad for me isn’t it? I’ll probably have a nervous breakdown”. Alison also alludes to the ubiquity of social media commenting:

Although I am not, you know, some people I know are just constantly you know, so I am not like people on, I don’t know, some activists I know are on Twitter constantly and social media constantly and it can’t be as big a part of my life as that, you know.

Interestingly, Alison compares herself and her own level of activity to others, suggesting that anxiety about doing enough is also present in

terms of online activism. Again, we see how individuals internalise other activists' judgements about the type and level of activism one does, resulting in participants policing and criticising themselves based on how they live up to the ideal perfect activist standard. Moreover, social media does not remove this barrier but actually heightens it, with the anxiety of not doing enough being compounded by the fact that individuals are constantly exposed to the activities of other activists via social media.

Although participants extol the virtues of social media and speak about the need for both online and offline spaces, as well as the interaction between the two, they tend to still consider offline activism to be more important than online activism. Beth speaks of online activism as “supplementary” to offline and Joe says that “grassroots campaigning [offline] is much more important” and that online activism “will always be ancillary to grassroots campaigning, in person, in the real world, in meet space”. In fact, despite being heavily involved in a campaign that is “nearly all online... and doesn't have a physical office, we have a virtual office as a Facebook page and run the campaign entirely out of that space”, Dana says that the campaign leaders “still need to get together obviously to keep that bond”, echoing Beth's and others' earlier comments about the need for face to face meetings in order to foster ‘strong ties’ (Putnam, 2000). We have seen then that while social media offers opportunities to overcome certain barriers to activism, particularly those of time constraints and accessibility to meetings, it also introduces new exclusions and does not erase the feelings of anxiety or guilt about “doing enough” that we saw earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, participants make a sharp distinction between online and offline activism, with the latter being deemed more valid, legitimate, and authentic than the former. Therefore, while participants acknowledge the centrality of social media in networked movements and that, in theory, the Internet enables individuals to become politically active,

participants do not necessarily *feel* active when involved in these activities. This is related to concerns about not doing the ‘right’ type of activism, with the online versus offline activism distinction being underlined by the talking versus action dichotomy that participants construct. Here, action usurps talking, as Owain summarises: “actions speak a lot louder than words”.

Having explored the ‘authentic activist’ identity in the previous chapter, this chapter has further unravelled the distinction made between ‘activist’ and ‘non-activist’ by exploring the ‘ideal perfect activist’ identity. This identity is defined by the type and level of activism one does and is often combined with the construction of the ‘authentic’ activist to produce an over-arching definitive activist identity. Here, activists need to have the innate characteristics and required lived experiences to be considered authentic, work tirelessly doing ‘enough’ activism to meet the criteria of the ‘right’ level of activism, and do the ‘right’ type of activism — direct action. Clearly the ‘activist’ bar is set high, which contradicts the notion of activism being a universal activity which anyone and everyone can and should do and where “doing what you can” is all that matters.

It emerges that rather than being a self-identification, ‘activist’ is a title to be awarded by somebody with authority, and that in this respect the activist is ‘interpellated’ by another. Notably, we have seen that this title is held in high regard by many participants and it is because of this that many do not consider themselves to be an activist as they feel that they do not do “enough” to *deserve* the title. It is judgements that come from within the activist community and which are enforced by practices of shaming that determine who can claim the activist identity. However, it becomes clear that individuals internalise such judgements, policing and criticising their own behaviour based on what they perceive others to think of them. Further, it appears that there is a discrepancy between personal definitions of what constitutes ‘enough’ (and whether one is

achieving it or not) and social definitions from other activists in the community. Significantly, participants are solely concerned with the social definition of activist, lacking any personal definition of 'enough'.

While it has been suggested that such concerns about whether one is "doing enough" can encourage individuals to become more active (Jacobsson and Lindblom, 2012), I contend that it has the opposite effect of paralysing activists because of the negative emotional impact which the pressure to "do more" has on individuals. We have seen that the result of such expectations is individuals devaluing their contributions and activist burnout, which problematically is perceived to be an individual's problem (and thus, a personal failing) rather than a collective one. Significantly, it is again those who are the most vulnerable and/or disadvantaged who are at the greatest risk. Furthermore, burnout is detrimental not only to individuals but to the wider activist community also as it results in key activists disengaging from activism in order to recover. In response, I have suggested that activist burnout needs to be redefined as a collective problem and managed as such, by fostering spaces of communication where individuals can speak openly about their feelings and through reframing caring as solidarity so that caring becomes an activist's rather than a women's activity. At the same time, it is recognised that treating burnout as a collective issue is problematic when part of the cause of such strains is the pressures which come from within the activist community and that we must be careful not to place the burden of caring for other activists on the shoulders of women.

Indeed, I have demonstrated that problematically, it is women activists who are the most affected by anxiety and guilt about "doing enough" of the 'right' thing, adding to gendered barriers and exclusions to activism. Drawing on Kennelly (2014), I suggest that this is related to the neoliberal context of responsabilisation and the retraditionalisation of gender norms. Here, traditional gender norms and roles are reinforced,

along with the binary between men and women, resulting in the restriction of women's opportunities to participate politically. Further, within the context of a gendered neoliberalism, women especially feel the pressure and responsibility to meet expectations of doing "enough" activism, and are deeply troubled by guilt when they 'fail'. The key question is raised of 'how much is enough?'. It appears that the elusive 'enough' is always *just* out of reach. The 'just' is significant as in order to feel guilty for failing to reach a benchmark, one must believe that such a benchmark is achievable and that it is entirely within one's power to achieve it, an attitude which is perpetuated by neoliberal ideology. Thus, guilt becomes a gendered emotion that is influenced by the cultural and structural context of the society within which individuals are doing activism. Moreover, this gendered dimension of the negative emotions that result from self-policing is not recognised by participants. Clearly, this is problematic as it obscures the presence of further gendered barriers and exclusions to social movements, with the result being that women are more likely to disengage from social movements.

We saw in the last chapter that the 'ideal perfect activist' is inherently male. This chapter has reinforced this by demonstrating how the emphasis placed on direct action over other forms of activism reflects traditionally masculine thought and behaviour. Direct action is often associated with traditionally masculine traits such as physical confrontation, toughness, and aggression. Within this context, women's bodies are conspicuous 'bodies out of place' (Puwar, 2004). Significantly, the activist doxa serves to naturalise and obscure traditionally masculine behaviours which form the benchmark of what it means to be an activist and which are perceived to be abstract and gender-neutral by participants. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is subtly reinforced, resulting in women and men who do not perform this particular version of masculinity being pushed out of activist spaces. Further, the obscured nature of the gendered 'ideal perfect activist' results in individuals

blaming themselves rather than structural factors for their perceived 'failings'.

Notably, this emphasis placed on direct action is underlined by a distinction between talking and doing, which relies on a binary that exists in relation to other binaries, namely, private/public, and female/male, where the latter in these are privileged and the former (women, talking, and the private sphere) are perceived to be inferior. Despite participants' earlier emphasis on activism being motivated by caring, it is revealed that the 'ideal perfect activist' identity is defined not by caring, but by *doing* (as suggested by the very question "am I *doing* enough?"). Clearly, actions are placed above talking, with the sharp distinction that is drawn between the two suggesting that participants do not conceive of talking as a form of acting, but something entirely separate and even antithetical to doing. This distinction is reflected by how direct action is constructed as the pinnacle of 'real' activism and defined in opposition to online activism, or so-called 'slacktivism'. Moreover, this disparaging of 'slacktivism' reflects the desire for 'activist' to be a title that is earned by hard work of the 'right' type (direct action), and serves to create further barriers to activism for individuals who are already restricted from participating politically.

It becomes clear that 'activist' is a complex identity rife with ambivalence and contradictions which participants negotiate and, at times, resist. Indeed, similar to Alexander's (2013: 3) assessment of modernity, it is both 'blocking and facilitating'. While it may seem pessimistic and hopeless to focus on the 'dark side' of activism, by doing so we capture the complex and human reality of activism, shedding light on the messy and ambivalent nature of activist cultures. Moreover, drawing attention to this aspect of activism opens up potential for challenging and overcoming the negative elements within the local activist community.

Chapter 8: A Summary of the Key Research Findings and Contributions

This research project began with the aim of exploring individuals' meanings and experiences of anti-austerity activism within the local context in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the motivating and sustaining factors for political participation and 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of local anti-austerity activist cultures. The research sought to develop a cultural, affective approach to studying social movements that investigated the role of emotion in the processes of 'making' and 'practising' activist cultures and which paid close attention to the everyday experiences of political participation. At the same time, the research was concerned with developing an understanding of the ways in which such processes, experiences, and environments were gendered and utilised a 'gender lens' (Einwohner et al, 2000) to explore this. The research also employed a feminist approach that prioritised the voices of participants and sought to make gender inequalities visible, with an aim to combatting these in future.

A review of the literature revealed the absence of gender in mainstream social movement theory and the need to incorporate feminist analyses of social movements into theorising about social movements (Taylor, 1999). Within the context of austerity and neoliberalism, questions were raised about the relationship between gender, care, and activism, and whether we are witnessing a 'detraditionalisation' or 'retraditionalisation' of gender roles and norms, as well as the influence of this on women's political participation. Alongside this, questions arose about the role of emotion in motivating and sustaining political participation, with an aim of concentrating on the affective, cultural, and feminist aspects of movement engagement that have been paid less attention in mainstream social movement theory to date. Focussing on the context of anti-

austerity activism and drawing on Bourdieu (1992), an investigation into the processes of local activist cultures and identities was planned. This investigation sought to explore the specifics of local anti-austerity activism, including the ways in which online and offline spaces were utilised for political engagement within the context of ‘networked social movements’ (Castells, 2012) and how identities were created and negotiated within specific activist cultures. Given the disproportionate impact of austerity on women, the specific questions posed about gender within the neoliberal political context, and the need for feminist analysis to be incorporated into social movement theory, gender was woven throughout this investigation. As identified above, this was made possible by the utilising of a ‘gender lens’ to explore the ways in which gender influences all aspects of movement activity and a feminist approach to research that placed concerns about gender inequalities at the forefront.

Having presented my analysis of the research findings in the last 4 chapters, this chapter will conclude by returning to the initial research questions that emerged as the research focus developed and sharpened (identified in chapter 3), demonstrating how the thesis has answered these. Following this, I will outline the original contributions made by the thesis before suggesting potential directions for future research.

What motivates and sustains anti-austerity activism?

Participants are motivated by a combination of emotions and normative ideals. While a rationalistic approach to studying anti-austerity movements may assume that their key goal is to impact social policy and to reverse austerity, invoking a cultural and affective approach reveals that it is more complex than this. Reinforcing Della Porta (2015) I have shown that while anti-austerity activism does appeal to social protections of the past, it is also concerned with imagining a better and more just future, which is rooted in wider normative ideals that participants assert. Here, a concern is not simply with impacting social policy but with

spreading these normative ideals of justice, empathy, and equality, and linking these to notions of what it means to be human. Participants thus draw on ideas of a common humanity and stress the need to reassert human dignity in the face of neoliberal capitalism which actively erodes these values. In doing so, participants centre on the role of empathy as a motivating and sustaining force for activism, combining morals and the emotional. In this respect, activism is interpreted as a form of caring, both about austerity, and about the people affected by austerity. Participants therefore reinforce Brown et al's (2013) contention that anti-austerity activism is a response to a 'crisis of care' and that this response demonstrates the possibility for alternative social relations based on care. The definition of activism is therefore widened, with participants claiming that "anyone and everyone can and should do activism".

Participants are motivated by the desire to "do something rather than nothing", and making small changes at the everyday level. Here, participants reinterpret neoliberal responsabilisation discourses as a way of justifying and encouraging "small acts" of individual activism, implying that "doing what you can" is all that matters. Significantly, they distinguish this from the negative effects of neoliberal ideology by emphasising the importance of the collective over the individual. Therefore, participants utilise a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' to read austerity and neoliberal ideologies, which involves 'an attempt at unmasking disguised meanings and practical implications' (Levitas, 2012: 332). At the same time, they invoke a 'hermeneutic of faith' which is 'an attempt to restore meaning to a narrative and its different voices and silences' (Ibid). Thus we see the complexities and dialectics present in anti-austerity activism.

Moreover, participants demonstrate the motivating and sustaining forces of solidarity and collective identity, signifying that despite contrary expectations, solidarity is fostered within networked social movements. Here, creativity and fun play a central role, highlighting the subversive

and playful dimension of activism which is revealed by paying close attention to the affective and cultural aspects of political engagement. At the same time, participants are motivated by their sense of self, with doing activism enabling them to view themselves as moral. In this respect, activism itself and its rewards of social relationships and self-esteem act as motivating and sustaining factors.

How is the activist identity constructed, negotiated, and performed (or resisted) by participants?

I have demonstrated that the activist identity is complex, continually negotiated by participants, and at times, resisted. Therefore 'activist' appears to be 'a floating signifier, in that it means different things to different people in different contexts' (Portwood-Stacer, 2013: 37). Contestation over how the activist identity is defined does not take place solely within the activist field but is influenced by other key players, particularly the media. Participants recognise that 'activist' tends to be associated with negative connotations of violence or to be linked to party politics. In order to distance themselves from these associations, some participants reject the identity altogether. For some participants the activist label holds personal negative connotations of men who have acted violently against women within the activist community, drawing our attention to the sexism that exists here, and therefore is rejected. Despite this, the 'floating signifier' nature of the term is reinforced by the way in which all participants accept a shared definition of activist within the context of the activist field, where the identity is interpreted in a positive light and its wider public connotations are rejected.

There are two central constructions of the 'activist' identity which combine to produce an over-arching definition. These are the 'authentic' activist who has the required lived experiences to possess the authority to speak about certain topics, and the 'ideal perfect' activist who does the 'right' type (direct action) and level of activism. I have called this

construction 'ideal perfect' because of the high standard it represents, as well as how individuals perceive it to be the goal to strive for. The combination of these identities sets the bar very high for achieving the activist label, which has severe consequences. The 'authentic' activist's authenticity, and thus legitimacy and authority, is amplified by the construction of the 'middle class activist type', who is denigrated as the antithesis of what a 'true' activist should be, lacking the required lived experiences to be able to speak with authority about the issues at hand. Here we see the way in which there are different 'types' of activist, which are arranged into a hierarchy where 'authenticity' is the pinnacle.

However, this emphasis on lived experiences poses several problems; it suggests that despite participants' assertion that empathy acts as a key motivation for activism, this has limitations, with some participants contending that *only* those with the required lived experiences can understand issues. It might be useful to bring Levinas' (1969) idea of 'responsibility' back in here, whereby individuals have a responsibility to one another even when we cannot understand the other's experience. There is a danger of putting too much emphasis on difference, resulting in those who have lived experiences of a certain issue being *only* allowed to speak about what is relevant to their group, and whatever they say being interpreted as *only* relevant to this group, lacking any wider significance. Moreover, there is the risk that issues of representation will devolve into 'oppression top-trumps' where differences become the basis for a process of one-downmanship, in which the most oppressed is perceived to be the most authentic and therefore has the most authority to speak. This problem is reflected by how the concept of 'check your privilege' has mutated to become a strategy of policing and shaming other activists (and thus silencing them), rather than a necessary process of reflexivity. Thus, there is a careful balancing act to perform between recognising and respecting difference and becoming preoccupied with this 'hierarchy of oppression', which has implications for sustaining unity

among activist communities, provoking further exploration into how this balance can be achieved.

In fact, in some contexts, participants contend that *not* having lived experiences of an issue can afford the speaker more legitimacy to speak as they are able to use their privileged social position to push oppressed groups' desires and needs into the public sphere. In this respect, the role and position of activists and social movements is conceived of as a bridge between those affected by the issues, the public, and those in political power. However, this particular construction implies that activists have access to the 'truth' and are enlightened in a way that the majority of individuals are not, with the activists' role therefore being to spread this knowledge, or to 'raise consciousness'. Therefore, activists are clearly distinguished from 'non-activists', revealing the tension between participants' statement that "anyone and everyone can and should do activism" and the ways in which the activist ideal is constructed.

Participants' distinction between activist and non-activist raises the question of what defines one person as an activist, and another as either a non-activist, or simply someone who does activism. It becomes clear that there is a difference between *doing* activism and *being* an activist. Participants suggest that activists possess innate characteristics such as being more caring, sensitive, and empathetic than others. This again poses problems for how we understand empathy, for at the same time, participants suggest that empathy is a universal human quality. Further, if to be an activist requires innate qualities then the implication is that these cannot be learned and thus a person cannot 'become' an activist through the work that they do. Yet, participants speak about activism as a journey and suggest that the identity can shift over time, depending on one's level of involvement, which suggests that the activist identity is related to the activities which one does, not just the type of person they are. Therefore, it appears that being an activist is the result of a personal journey which in theory, anyone can undergo, but that certain

individuals are predisposed towards becoming activists because they have the required lived experiences and innate characteristics that underline being an 'authentic' activist.

Notably, authenticity is 'ascribed, not inscribed' (Moore, 2002: 209), with others deciding who is 'authentic' or not, as we have seen in the activist community. Similarly, it emerges that the activist identity is conceived of as a special title which has to be earned by being the 'right' type of person *and* by doing the 'right' level and type of activism. Therefore, 'activist' is not a self-identification but one that is 'interpellated', being hailed into being by someone else with the authority to do so. The implication of this is that individuals need to be seen to be doing activism, meaning that visible 'big' actions take precedence over smaller less visible ones. Here we start to see how the construction of the activist identity contradicts participants' earlier claims that "small actions" count and that "doing what you can" is all that matters.

This contradiction is further reinforced by the 'ideal perfect' activist identity which participants construct and uphold within the activist community. This is defined by doing the 'right' type of activism, which tends to be direct action, and the 'right' level of activism, working tirelessly and constantly fighting for the political cause. Therefore, it emerges that the ideal perfect activist identity is defined not by caring, but by *doing* (as suggested by the often repeated question "am I doing enough?"). The implication of this construction is that the question of 'how much is enough?' remains forever hanging over the heads of participants, with the attainment of 'enough' perhaps always being just out of reach. This results in the constant pressure to "do more", while never feeling like one is "doing enough". Problematically, individuals internalise others' judgements about the level and type of activism they do, policing themselves and judging their own behaviour based on what they perceive others to think of them. Significantly, participants are solely concerned with the social definition of activist, lacking any

personal definition of 'enough'. What's more, it appears that there is a discrepancy between what participants perceive the social definition to be and what it actually is, resulting in individuals making harsher judgements of themselves than others perhaps would. Rather than propel activists to become more active, as Jacobsson and Lindblom (2012) suggest, I have demonstrated that the anxiety and negative emotions caused by this pressure can result in individuals undervaluing their contributions and activist burnout, whereby individuals remove themselves entirely from the activist community. Therefore, the 'ideal perfect' activist identity acts as a barrier to participating politically. Problematically, it is the most disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals who are most likely to experience these negative impacts.

To what extent is the activist identity gendered?

Firstly, the emphasis placed on doing the 'right' level of activism results in those who cannot commit to activism around the clock being unable to achieve the identity. This exclusion is gendered as I have demonstrated that women have specific time constraints related to their caring responsibilities which act as a barrier to doing activism. Problematically, the anxiety and guilt that result from the pressure to "do enough", are felt more acutely by women, who blame themselves for failing to live up to these expectations, thus turning these negative emotions against themselves. Here, guilt is perceived to be a gendered 'structure of feeling' (Kennelly, 2014), with neoliberal responsibilisation discourses impacting especially on women, demonstrating the gendered nature of neoliberalism (Gill and Scharff, 2011; Brown, 2015). This not only has negative impacts but also acts as a gendered barrier to political participation as these negative emotions make it more likely that women will disengage from social movements.

Secondly, and critically, while the 'ideal perfect activist' is imagined as a universal, abstract character, it becomes clear that actually, the ideal activist is the able-bodied male. This is because of how the identity is

defined by the ability to commit all of one's time to activism combined with the emphasis placed on force and traditionally masculine ways of thinking and acting. Here, the privileging of direct action implies that 'real' activists are those who 'take it to the streets' and engage in risky, forceful action. Therefore, less masculine, or by implication, 'feminine' forms of activism are denounced, excluding anyone who is unable or unwilling to perform direct action from being an activist. Problematically, the gendered nature of the ideal activist identity is obscured and reinforced by the activist doxa which upholds and naturalises traditional masculine values. Thus, as we have seen, women perceive their inability to achieve the 'ideal perfect activist' identity as a personal failing rather than a structural or social one. Significantly, this activist ideal reinforces hegemonic masculinity, which is the dominant form of masculinity and perceived to be the standard that all men should strive for. Therefore, it is not only women who are effected by such constructions but also men who do not perform hegemonic masculinity, provoking future investigation into how such values are recognised (or not) by men and their impact.

Finally, though caring is identified as being central to activism and a key motivation for political action, participants construct private caring roles and the activist role as conflicting, suggesting that women can only truly succeed at one of these. Here, women who are 'active activists' are perceived to be 'bad mothers', because 'good mothers' do not have the time to be 'active activists'. There is a link here with the inherent masculinity of the activist identity, as 'mother' is perceived as a feminine role and thus cannot be combined with a role that is conceived of as its opposite — masculine. Notably, local anti-austerity activism has strategically used traditional tropes of gender and femininity including the idea of mothers protecting their children's future and women as nurses in order to defend the NHS. However, in the local scene this was a case of 'too little too late' for many women participants. Moreover, while

reinforcing traditional feminine roles can enable some women to participate politically, it also restricts the available 'acceptable' ways for women to participate politically, and thus, has an overall constraining effect.

What barriers exist that prevent individuals from participating politically?

Though participants emphasise that "anyone and everyone can and should do activism", it becomes clear that not everyone *can* do activism as the costs of activism act as a barrier to participating politically. Again, it is the most disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals who are more likely to experience these barriers. While participants assert the need for anti-austerity activism to be led by those who are the most affected by austerity, the practical constraints caused by austerity prevent these people from participating. This poses problems concerning who can and who should speak about certain issues, as well as who is listened to, which we have seen are central concerns within the activist community, relating to the 'authentic' activist identity. There is an issue, then, of 'privilege', where activists do not recognise the privilege required to do activism and yet at the same time use the notion of 'checking your privilege' in damaging ways to police others. It appears that activism is a luxury that only the privileged can afford because they are in a position to channel their frustrations in socially acceptable ways, while more confrontational action is a risk that these same people cannot afford to take precisely because of their social position. Further, the paradox of participatory democracy is that participation requires time and therefore attempts to make politics more participatory exclude those who cannot commit the extra time required to participate (as we have seen in the case of women's structural opportunity barriers).

Significantly, the activist identity and label can act as a barrier to political participation by creating a division between activists and the

general public, or 'non-activists'. Indeed, while the close-knit activist community helps to maintain and sustain involvement, it can also be exclusive, producing what has been called the 'activist bubble'. In this respect, the activist field becomes closed off to 'outsiders', appearing intimidating and exclusionary because of its shared language and habitus. This exclusive nature has been characterised by some participants as an arrogant activist mentality which many wish to distance themselves from. This attitude thus acts as a barrier to becoming politically engaged for individuals with less knowledge or experience of activism, as well as for existing activists who do not wish to be associated with such attitudes.

Finally, we have seen that the problematic construction of the 'ideal perfect activist' identity, which is defined by doing the 'right' type and level of activism, results in negative emotional, psychological, and physical effects because of the pressures individuals feel to attain this ideal and that these effects are implicitly gendered, resulting in women disengaging from social movements.

To what extent are these barriers gendered?

In contrast to studies that show a decrease in gendered structural opportunity barriers, I have demonstrated that women still face additional time burdens that are usually related to their private caring roles and which act as a barrier to political participation. More than this, it emerges that local anti-austerity activism neglects to take account of women's concerns such as caring responsibilities and thus excludes women from attending meetings and protests. This appears to be a reflection of the tendency for anti-austerity activism to be dominated by white men for whom class is the most important issue, to the neglect of other intersecting issues such as gender, race, and disability. Participants suggest that this mirrors a wider societal lack of concern with women's issues, meaning that the same gender inequalities that are present in mainstream political institutions are also present in spaces of resistance.

There is the suggestion, then, that rather than a ‘detraditionalisation’ of gender structures, we are witnessing a ‘retraditionalisation’ of gender roles and norms which is accelerated and heightened within the context of austerity. This is because of the ‘triple jeopardy’ women face, losing their public services, their paid jobs providing these services, and being expected to pick up the remaining work, unpaid (Fawcett Society, 2012). There is a real risk, then, that the traditional public/private divide, and associated male/female binary, is being reinforced and solidified in the current context, resulting in the restriction of women’s opportunities to participate politically and an additional gendered burden of care for the community.

What’s more, we have seen that the implicit, subtle ways that activism is gendered (and not recognised as being so), results in ‘informal impediments’ which prevent full participation when gendered and classed modes of communicating are ignored (Fraser, 1992: 119). Therefore, even if initial access barriers are overcome, there are still further barriers and exclusions which prevent individuals, and especially women, from participating politically.

How can (gendered) barriers and exclusions to activism be overcome?

In response to such gendered barriers and exclusions to activism, women form their own feminist resistance to austerity, providing practical support for other women affected by the cuts and utilising women-only spaces to do so. I have shown that while this may be empowering, it is also problematic as it reinforces the ‘triple jeopardy’ thesis, and contributes to the retraditionalisation of gender roles and norms. Despite this, it is important to recognise the significance of women-only spaces where women feel that their voices are heard and which enable women to positively reinterpret gender as facilitating, rather than blocking, political participation. Here, participants invoke a feminist

standpoint, suggesting that women actually make better activists than men because they are innately more caring and possess a different, and privileged, type of knowledge. Again, this solution is problematic as it reinforces the traditional gender binary and associated behaviours upon which women are constitutively excluded from the public sphere and political action. However, this approach does contain the seeds of a potential solution to barriers and exclusions to activism, namely by stepping outside of the strictly defined 'activist' role and redefining activism in terms of the everyday and, particularly, as a form of care.

Redefining activism as caring could potentially widen our understanding of activism and degender care by making it a collective activity that activists do, rather than one which women do. Significantly, the grounds for doing so are present within participants' narratives, which draw on the centrality of empathy as a motivating and sustaining force. Here, we can draw on a feminist ethic of care which combines feelings of empathy for the other with a moral duty to act, resulting in the practical act of providing care for others. Vitaly, such notions of care need to be extended *within* activist cultures, alongside related ideas concerning the importance of collectivism above individualism in order to prevent activist burnout from being considered an individual weakness and problem for the individual to solve, and to prevent the pressures which result in such burnout. This would benefit the collective as a whole, as well as individuals, by eliminating the need for key activists to remove themselves from activist cultures and their stresses; thus strengthening the community and providing better support to individuals who would be less likely to interpret struggles as personal failings.

However, we must be careful that caring for others does not become an additional responsibility and burden, which is more likely to fall to women as the traditional carers and emotional labourers within movements (Holyoak, 2015: 134). One way to prevent this is to reframe 'caring' as 'solidarity' so that it becomes part of the activist habitus,

redefining caring acts as those of activists rather than women. Another solution is provided by Kennelly (2014) who suggests fostering a space of communication within activist cultures where individuals can speak openly about their experiences and feelings, including negative ones, and which in time becomes part of the activist habitus. However, the need for collective treatment of activist burnout is problematic when part of the cause of such strains is the pressures which come from within the activist community. While I have suggested that fostering a culture of caring and communication would lessen such pressures, it is vital that this is combined with actively breaking down the hierarchies of activism and removing the shaming practices that maintain these hierarchies within activist cultures. Again, this requires a widening of our understanding of activism and what it means to be an activist to include more accessible forms of activism, not solely direct action. Indeed, women suggest that online activism is a way of overcoming gendered barriers and exclusions to activism because it provides a method of combining caring roles with activism, reducing the costs of activism and giving individuals a voice. Yet because of how online activism is constructed in relation to direct action, with the former being denigrated, individuals often still feel guilty for not doing the 'right' type of action, resulting in the dampening of such feelings of political agency and activeness which online activism can produce. I will now explore this construction in more detail before summarising the original contributions to knowledge this thesis makes and concluding with future directions for research.

How do online and offline political spaces and forms of activism interact?

Participants construct online and offline activism in opposition to each other, with the former being referred to as "soft", "slacktivism", and "armchair activism" and the latter being constructed as "real" "direct action" that involves "actually *doing* something". Direct action is

therefore perceived to be a more valid and legitimate form of activism than online activism which is perceived to be less authentic and therefore less worthy. Notably, the disparaging of so-called 'slacktivism' for being 'easy' and 'lazy' reflects an underlying concern about the activist identity being a title that has to be earned through 'risky', and traditionally masculine, action. This distinction between online and offline activism is underlined by the talking versus doing binary construction, where "actions speak louder than words" and speech is conceived of as something entirely separate and even antithetical to doing. We have already seen how this emphasis on direct action privileges traditionally masculine behaviours. It also implies the importance of visibility, with concern being not only about doing something but about being witnessed doing it. Therefore, less visible forms of activism such as online activism are relegated to the bottom of the activism hierarchy. Further, problems are posed concerning the *invisibility* of women's actions in comparison to the visibility of the Anarchist Action Man (Coleman and Bassi, 2011) doing direct action.

The denigration of online activism is problematic not only because of the emotional impacts it has on individuals but also because it minimises the positive, enabling aspects of online forms of activism. Participants remark that social media is a way of seeing "around" mainstream media and is therefore more truthful, providing the potential for people to become informed and politically motivated to act and change the current situation. The speed and ubiquity of social media means that individuals can be connected at almost any time and thus can be mobilised from within their homes, being provided the opportunity to become active in ways that they would not otherwise be. Further, some participants suggest that social media erases 'informal impediments' by affording the anonymity and distance to speak openly and freely. However, we have seen that this is not always the case, particularly in women's experiences where they can still receive hostility because of their gender. Further, we

must be mindful that the use of technology creates new exclusions for those who do not have access to or the knowledge to use technology. Moreover, the ubiquity of social media can also have a dark side with the constant exposure to the activities of others heightening individuals' anxiety about "doing enough". Despite these drawbacks, the fact that being active online can provide a channel for political action which would not otherwise be open to some individuals and thus is empowering, should not be underestimated. We return to the notion that our definitions and understanding of activism need to be widened to incorporate various forms of activity and that alongside this, the damaging hierarchy of activism which is constructed and maintained within activist cultures needs to be broken down.

It becomes clear, then, that activist cultures are complex, dynamic, and ambivalent spaces which are rife with contradictions. In particular, there is a clear contradiction between the centrality of empathy as a motivating and sustaining factor for doing activism and the notion that only those with lived experiences can truly understand the issues and therefore be 'real' activists. Another problematic contradiction is that between the assertion that 'anyone and everyone can and should do activism' and the reality that this is not always the case, which is compounded by how the activist identity is constructed and the existence of a hierarchy of activism. While the presence of such contradictions and tensions might leave us feeling hopeless that any solutions to existing barriers and exclusions to activism can be realised, harnessing the hopeful attitude of participants I contend that the grounds for improving experiences of political participation lie within activist cultures, as I have attempted to demonstrate above. In this respect, we can perhaps draw on Habermas' (1992: 429) argument that despite its downfalls and exclusions, the public sphere contains within it the potential for 'self-transformation'. Here, the public sphere's grounding in universalist discourses of equality and rights provides the

platform from which inequalities can be challenged. While I have identified the need to be wary when assuming ‘universal abstract’ categories because of how this assumed universality can often mask inherent inequalities, there remains a kernel of potential in this argument which I believe can be applied to activist cultures. As Kohn (2003: 8) argues, theorising about democracy ‘can be understood as a dialectical process whereby the normative core of the concept and its particular manifestations continually transform one another’. I have demonstrated that the normative ideals of equality, empathy, common humanity, and activism as a form of care are present within activist cultures; therefore, the seeds for change already exist but require nurturing in order to grow into actualisation.

By illuminating the ‘dark side’ of activist cultures, it is hoped that we not only recognise the complex human nature and nuances of this environment but also that activists will be able to identify both enabling and constraining elements of activist cultures, and use this as a basis for improvement as well as reinforcement of the positive aspects. Therefore, in line with feminist research practice and a participant-centred research approach, these findings will be fed back to the groups involved.

Having provided a summary of how the thesis has answered the initial research questions, I now turn to outline the contributions to knowledge that this thesis makes, before exploring possible future directions for building on this research.

The thesis’ contribution to knowledge

This thesis contributes to the development of a gender-focussed social movement theory by utilising a gender lens to explore the ways in which gender influences the processes of political engagement, both explicitly and implicitly. This is a key theoretical contribution; as Taylor (1999), Roseneil (1995), and Charles (2000) outline, there is a need for mainstream social movement theory to incorporate feminist analyses of

movement activities and for a distinct approach to studying social movements that takes full account of the role of gender in social movement organisations and political participation. Anti-austerity activism is an important case for doing this given the disproportionate impact of austerity on women and the 'triple jeopardy' that women face (Fawcett Society 2012). Furthermore, as a movement that does not explicitly define itself as 'feminist' (in the local context at least), anti-austerity activism provides an interesting setting within which to explore the role of gender in social movement participation more generally, in a context that is not overtly concerned with gender politics (though participants within the movement recognise the gendered nature of austerity).

By utilising a gender lens, I have revealed the obscured ways in which the activist identity is gendered and the negative gendered consequences of this, which are linked to the neoliberal context and its prevailing, gendered, responsabilisation discourses. Here, I have shown how the 'ideal perfect' activist, though presented as an abstract individual, is actually the able-bodied male, and how the ways in which activism is constructed prioritise traditionally masculine ways of thinking and acting over feminine ones, reflecting the traditional public/private and related male/female binary constructions. The result of such constructions is that women feel guilt and anxiety for not doing 'enough' of the 'right' type of activism and, critically, turn these negative feelings against themselves, misrecognising the consequences of gendered structures as personal failings. These negative emotions and the misrecognition of their source results in gendered symbolic violence (Kennelly, 2014).

Significantly, despite women participants identifying as feminists and drawing attention to the explicit gendered barriers that exist to doing activism, as well as the feminist dimension of anti-austerity activism, participants do not recognise the gendered nature of the 'ideal perfect'

activist identity and the associated negative emotions that emerge from failing to meet this standard. This reveals how insidious such gendered constructions and effects are, and reasserts the urgent need for research that explores and reveals the role of gender in contemporary political participation. Indeed, the hidden nature of the gendered negative impacts of how activism and the activist identity are constructed within activist cultures is deeply problematic as it obscures the presence of further gendered barriers and exclusions to political participation, meaning women are more likely to disengage from social movements, and their reasons for doing so are unlikely to be addressed. The thesis therefore exposes the power relations and imbalances *within* practices of resistance that are often neglected and obscured in studies of social movements that are perceived to be 'counter-hegemonic' (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 205). Making this visible opens up possibilities for challenging and overcoming such imbalances.

The thesis builds on the foundations laid by NSMT in terms of recognising the need to address the wider historical and political context within and out of which social movements emerge. In this case, I have demonstrated the ways in which neoliberalism infiltrates spaces of resistance to it and how dominant power relations and gender structures are replicated within alternative spaces of political action. I have highlighted the need to pay attention to the nuanced ways in which the wider context (of neoliberalism and austerity) interacts with resistance to it, creating ambivalence. In this respect, while women-only local activism that provides support for women who are affected by austerity empowers women and provides space for women's voices and activism, it also causes women to be 'complicit with the imposition of austerity' (Bramall, 2016: 136) by stepping in to fill the caring gaps created by public spending cuts, unpaid. Furthermore, it problematically reduces the pressure placed on mainstream campaigns against austerity to address gendered barriers and exclusions to participation.

Moreover, I have shown that in the current context we are actually witnessing a retraditionalisation of gender roles and norms, rather than the perceived detraditionalisation of gender structures that has been theorised. Here, explicit traditional gendered barriers and exclusions to doing political participation, such as those related to women's caring responsibilities, are reaffirmed and heightened in the context of austerity, which places a further unpaid caring burden on women, and anti-austerity activism, which prioritises implicitly masculine forms of activism. There is a real risk that the traditional gendered boundaries between the public and private spheres are being redrawn and solidified. This is a critical contribution at a time when gender roles and norms are perceived to have less relevance and when women, under neoliberalism, are perceived to be autonomous, free agents, more so than ever before. The thesis therefore firmly asserts the continuing need for feminist theorising and activism and the importance of paying close attention to the hidden ways gender structures and inequalities operate, even within spaces of resistance.

While I have demonstrated that participants of anti-austerity activism, unlike NSM, are largely working class, I have also revealed the ambivalence surrounding class within the current context. Here, I have shown that although participants perceive their working class roots to be an authentic basis for anti-austerity activism, participants' class identifications are not straight-forward. The majority of participants possess high levels of cultural capital in the form of education and qualifications but are in an uncertain employment situation, or, acknowledge that while they may now technically be 'middle class', identify more with their working class heritage, and the two categories of middle and working class seemingly clash uncomfortably for participants, creating ambivalence around class. Further, by exploring the intersections between gender and class, I have revealed that women participants tend to strategically prioritise gender over class in the

current context, being influenced by traditional associations between working class politics and men, which they wish to overcome. This reinforces Charles' (2000) contention that the dominance of class as a social cleavage in the UK has traditionally prevented struggles from being framed in terms of gender. The thesis therefore asserts and contributes to Charles' (2000) call for a social movement theory that explores both gender and class, and how they intersect.

Additionally, the thesis contributes to the building of a body of in-depth studies of the impacts of austerity and its resistance within specific local contexts, which, alongside large-scale studies of anti-austerity movements, improve our understanding of the complex and varied experiences of women fighting austerity in the everyday (see also 'Coventry Women's Voices' project outputs and the East London Fawcett Society, 2013). I have demonstrated the value of invoking culture, emotions, and gender as an approach in its own right, rather than as an 'addition' to existing theories. This approach enabled me to uncover the centrality of emotions and how they combine with morals in motivating and sustaining political participation. This has contributed to the development of an understanding of activism as a form of care and care work as activism, which further adds to a feminist theory of social movements.

By centring on participants' lived and felt experiences of activism, I have uncovered how the activist identity is fraught with contradictions and the crucial implications of this for political participation. I have also shown the importance of paying attention to differences *between* activist experiences. Indeed, my findings reinforce the contention that women's experiences within mixed gender movements differ from men's and that women's concerns are not listened to by men, resulting in women breaking away to form their own women-only groups for doing activism. Therefore, while anti-austerity activism attempts to establish itself as separate to party politics and the wider dominant neoliberal structures,

the same gender inequalities that are present in these contexts persist in this alternative space, suggesting deeply embedded gender structures and divides that are not recognised by participants and that need to be highlighted by social movement theory.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1992) theory of practice to explore local activist cultures has enabled me to cast light on the lesser-seen 'dark side' of activism, revealing the ways in which individuals involved in anti-austerity activism compete over symbolic and social capital and how the activist field within which this competition occurs, creates and reinforces a hidden, taken-for-granted, masculine 'doxa' that obscures the implicit gendered barriers and exclusions that exist not only to doing activism but to being an activist.

At the same time, this approach has enabled me to break the 'silence about the sphere of fellow feelings, the we-ness that makes society into society [...] and the processes that fragment it' (Alexander, 2006: 53). I have demonstrated how solidarity and collective identities are created and sustained within the context of anti-austerity activism and networked social movements, as well as how they are threatened. This investigation challenges the shift away from the study of collective identities within Sociology which we have witnessed with the rise in theories of reflexive modernisation that emphasise individualism over collectivism. It also demonstrates the importance of paying attention to what sustains political engagement over a long period of time, including latent times, rather than solely focusing on the initial motivating factors that enable movements to emerge. This reaffirms the importance of doing research that explores the 'why' questions of social movements, as well as the 'how' questions.

The thesis, therefore, demonstrates how the local anti-austerity activist culture, reflecting Alexander's (2013) conceptualisation of modernity, is 'Janus-faced', containing both enabling and positive elements that

empower individuals and a darker, hidden, and damaging side which I have revealed is distinctly gendered and multi-layered. Revealing and exploring this ambivalence demonstrates the value of looking closely at individual and collective experiences of political participation and situating these within the wider social, historical, and political context, as I have argued above.

Finally, this thesis has demonstrated that despite the seeming failure to impact on policies of austerity, individuals find creative ways to become politically active and to sustain this activity, by fostering positive emotions such as solidarity and hope that an imagined better future will be realised. Therefore, it is vital that we pay close attention to the meanings that individuals ascribe to their actions so that we do not miss the nuances that exist here. This also involves a need to reconsider how we define 'success' within the context of such resistance, as it becomes clear that participants do not solely consider success in instrumental terms of ending austerity. Instead, success is reinterpreted as resistance to a hostile, individualistic neoliberal capitalism which actively erodes core values of human dignity and collectivism. Indeed, despite the contradictions and ambivalence present, anti-austerity activism is rooted in ideas about what it means to be human and the importance of caring for and about others. By reinterpreting and subverting neoliberal responsabilisation discourses to emphasise the collective above the individual, reasserting human dignity, and reimagining the present in the mould of a better future, activists are not only creating 'cracks' in capitalism, which have the potential to be widened through agitation, but planting seeds of political change within them.

Future directions for research

Any piece of research of restricted scope is bound to have limitations and this project is no exception. To begin with, it was necessary that I provided boundaries to the research site in order to make it manageable, thus I selected the specific research context of Nottingham. This enabled

me to develop rich and detailed data over a set period of time but the ability to generalise from the findings is limited. Future research into other localities and a comparison between them would enable us to gain a fuller picture of anti-austerity activism as it occurs, on the ground, throughout the UK, including the similarities and differences between cases and perhaps provide potential solutions for problems that arise in one area but which are either absent or have been solved in another.

A further way in which the research could be built upon and its focus widened is by broadening the research sample, and in particular, paying attention to the experiences of people with disabilities, which was a topic that arose during my fieldwork but which I did not have scope to explore adequately, as well as the conspicuous absence of ethnic minority participants in local anti-austerity activism — to what extent is this the case in other localities and why? Both of these groups are important to study in the context of austerity which disproportionately impacts people with disabilities and ethnic minorities.

In fact, recent developments at the time of writing, suggest that ethnicity has been brought to the fore in local anti-austerity movements, with the rising visibility of Black Lives Matter protests and responses to the increase in racism which has been associated with the ‘Brexit’ campaign and decision for Britain to leave the EU. The local People’s Assembly has held several meetings and protests about racism; whether this will reflect an increase in BME participants remains to be seen.

My research was undertaken during a time of disengagement from and distrust of mainstream political institutions, especially party politics, which movements sought to distance themselves from completely. While the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour Leader suggested a shift in party politics towards a more hopeful anti-austerity mainstream politics, recent events have cast significant doubts on his potential. In the light of the momentous EU referendum results, where over half of the votes cast

were for leaving the EU, resulting in 'Brexit' (Britain's exit of the EU), there has been much political upheaval in both the Conservative and Labour parties. We now have a new Conservative party leader and PM — Theresa May — who has appointed a new cabinet, and at the same time are witnessing massive discord within the Labour party with many MPs challenging Corbyn's leadership, triggering another leadership election. It is impossible to predict the future, especially at such a tumultuous time where new events are seemingly unfolding every minute, however, one thing which is certain is that we are unlikely to see the end of austerity any time soon. Moreover, with an apparent rise in racism and much political uncertainty surrounding the 'Brexit' decision, it may be that concerns about austerity take a backseat for the time being. Whether these concerns will return to the fore remains to be seen in the coming months and years.

While it is easy to fall into hopeless pessimism at this time of political upheaval and uncertainty, there are glimpses of more positive aspects of the current moment which would be fruitful to explore further. Within the context of 'Brexit', it appears that citizens are becoming more politically active with many movements and individuals protesting the leave vote and associated political processes and social attitudes. Thus, the current moment opens up further opportunities to explore how social movements work with or outside of 'the system', and how the Brexit decision may have encouraged a turn towards grassroots politics. It would be insightful to see how the changing political landscape impacts upon those who previously rejected party politics, whether they have shifted more towards working 'within' the system and attempting to impact mainstream political institutions, or if there is still tension here.

Overall, this thesis sheds light on a distinct moment in the history of neoliberalism and resistance to it in the form of anti-austerity activism. It has explored the alternative spaces that open up in times of crisis, the alternative imaginaries that are created in these spaces, and the tensions

and ambivalence that exist here, focusing especially on the role played by emotion. In the context of austerity, which has been interpreted as a 'crisis of care' (Brown et al, 2013), combined with activist responses that emphasise caring and empathy, this thesis brings to the fore questions about the relationship between activism and care, austerity and care, and the gendered dimension and implications of these debates. It provides a strong foundation for future research into local anti-austerity activist cultures and reaffirms the importance of adopting a cultural, affective, and feminist approach that takes into account emotion and gender for future studies.

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Websites

www.nottinghamwomenscentre.com

www.peoplesassembly.org.uk

www.ukuncut.org.uk

Appendix

Interview Guide

This is a rough interview guide that I drew on for the interviews. This guide developed over the course of the interviews with different questions being added and removed from it and different areas of focus developing. Because the interviews were semi-structured and I was keen to explore the experiences and feelings of participants, this guide was used only as a loose framework and I allowed other topics to emerge and to be developed within the interviews.

- Could you start by introducing yourself please?
(age, occupation, family life, where you live, where you're from)

- What activities are you currently involved in (why)?
 - **What** is your role?
 - **How** did you get involved? (where/when did you hear about..)
 - **Why** are you involved?
 - What **groups**? How are they organised? Do you feel part of such groups?
 - Are there particular **places** you go to (such as women's centre, Sumac centre), why (what is their role)?
 - Are your friends involved in similar activities? Is the **social side** important?

- What have you been involved with **before** (why)?
 - How did you **first** get involved? Why?
 - How do you think your previous experiences impact on your current?

- What type of **actions** have you been to?

- Are there any that **stand out**? What were they like?
 - What do you think is **effective**, what hasn't been so effective?
 - What is the **purpose** of such actions?
 - Do you go to **local meetings**? Why/ why not?
- What is the role played by **social media** in activism today?
 - How important is it?
 - What is it used for?
 - Why?
- What has **the reaction** been **here in Nottingham** to the public spending cuts?
 - **Do you think Nottingham is a particularly active locality?**
 - Do you feel part of a broader movement?
 - How are the different campaigns related to each other?
(Local activist scene)
- The wider Left
 - Political parties? Mainstream politics?
 - Unions?
- **What issues** do you think **matter** most to people and why?
 - What issues matter to you?
 - **Who** do you feel is most affected by the cuts and why?
(women?)
 - Do you think the same issues matter **locally as nationally?**

- **Do you consider yourself to be a political activist?**
 - What does political activism mean to you? (connotations, other terms?)
 - What role does it play in your life?
 - How does it make you feel?

- **Feminism**
 - Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?
 - What does feminism mean to you?

- Is there anything else you would like to speak about?