

**“BE A DREAMER”: THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS AND RESOURCES IN SUSTAINING
PROGRESSIVE YOUTH ACTIVISM IN ALBERTA**

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DEDICATION

To those who shared their experiences, thank you for your trust.

To my family, thank you for your endless support.

To Ben, thank you for being my rock.

ABSTRACT

The fight for progressive social change in Alberta at this historical moment is happening in a highly polarized political climate in which far-right ideologies are ascendent. In the face of this, youth activists aged 18 to 35 are committed to fighting against oppressive systems of power based in the ultra-conservatism of the province in an effort to enact progressive change. Using qualitative interviews and discourse analysis, this thesis seeks to address the following question: What sustains youth activism in Alberta?

This thesis answers this question by focusing on two key elements of sustainment. First, it examines the role of emotions in moving activists towards action and helping sustain their efforts. While sadness signals an awareness of injustice, anger transforms this awareness into action. Hope provides sustainment through its future-oriented optimism while empathy and love connect activists to those who are suffering— sustaining, and driving transformative action. Second, it examines the role of resource availability and distribution in sustaining activism. Resource availability is determined not only by what resources are needed for subsistence, but also how resources are produced and distributed within unequal systems of power. As such, this thesis considers not only material resources but also how sustainability is a social process that depends on solidarity and mutual care.

By highlighting the emotional and material conditions that sustain youth activism, this study demonstrates how progressive activism is cultivated and sustained within an intensifying conservative landscape.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Work described in this thesis received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Beyond Opposition: Examining How Progressive Youth Social Movements are Sustained in Alberta”, Pro00138556, Feb 11th, 2025.

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To my interview participants Azi, B, Dayn, Emily, Francine, Katie, Маки, Marko, Rebecca, and Sam: Thank you for your willingness to explore what sustains your activist work. I hope my written work does your stories justice and that you can feel proud about sharing your story to help others sustain their activist efforts.

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation, I would like to acknowledge that this research takes place on traditional, stolen lands of diverse Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have lived in Alberta since time immemorial; they represent ways of life that were and are disrupted by colonialism. I would like to acknowledge the specific Nations of the regions which my research took place on and where my participants came from: The Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Stoney and Nakoda people in Treaty 7, and the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota, Dene, and Assiniboine people in Treaty 6.

I acknowledge the privilege that I hold, as an uninvited white settler living and working on these lands. I recognize that I must do better to undo the harms of colonialism. As a personal commitment, I will seek opportunities to support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, while listening to and respecting Indigenous voices.

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INTRODUCTION

There are days where it does feel hopeless and you have to really drag your nails in and pull back to that place where you can feel like there is some hope.

– Dayn (Interviewee)

Research Overview

The longstanding orientation of state politics in Alberta has been Conservative, from the Social Credit Party of the 1930s, to the almost 40 years of Progressive Conservative rule. After a four years stint of power held by the New Democratic Party (NDP) from 2015 through 2019, Alberta elected the United Conservative Party (UCP), a party that unified the Progressive Conservative Party (PCP) and the far-right Wild Rose Party. In 2022, former Wild Rose leader Danielle Smith became the UCP leader. At the time of her election, Smith was best known for her proposed Alberta Sovereignty Act, which claims to protect Alberta from federal policies it viewed as harmful to the province (Government of Alberta, n.d.-a). The Act was used for the first time in 2023 to combat the federal government's goal of achieving a net-zero electricity grid by 2035 (Baxter, 2023).

A deepening trend towards authoritarianism in Alberta is exemplified by the government's deployment of a "parental rights" ideology to justify restricting practices of inclusivity in school age education policy (Ganshorn, 2025) and the UCP's invocation of the notwithstanding clause in October 2025 that forced striking teachers to accept a contract they did not agree with, ultimately forcing them back to work (Bellefontaine & Teeling, 2025). This rightward shift in provincial politics is also evident in the use of the notwithstanding clause to pass Bill 9, the *Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment*

Act, 2025. Specifically, Bill 9 aims to apply the notwithstanding clause to three statutes that came into effect in December 2024: Bill 26; the *Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*; Bill 27, the *Education Amendment Act, 2024*; and Bill 29, the *Fairness and Safety in Sport Act, 2024* (Koshan, 2025). These Bills are intended to restrict gender affirming care for trans youth under 16, implement controls over the use of preferred names and pronouns in schools, and ban transgender girls from female sports, respectively (Johnson, 2025). In addition to its use of the notwithstanding clause, the UCP government has also refused to participate in the federal government's national gun buyback program, and has prohibited local law enforcement from taking part. The program is a voluntary program that allows gun owners to return their outlawed "assault-style" firearms for compensation (Said, 2026).

In the face of deepening conservatism, the fight for progressive change can often seem hopeless. This is illustrated by the opening epigraph from interview participant Dayn, a 25-year-old queer rights activist from Calgary. Katie, a 34-year-old queer rights advocate in Lethbridge, echoes Dayn, emphasizing that there is "definitely hopelessness and helplessness, especially with governments right now that don't seem to be listening to the people." Both Dayn and Katie exemplify why studying progressive activism in Alberta is so important. What sustains progressive youth activism in Alberta in the face of such growing/deepening far-right strength? What are the driving forces that keep youth fighting? What motivates, supports, and strengthens their drive to continue to fight for what they believe in? Using qualitative interviews and discourse analysis, I seek to answer the following question: what sustains youth activism in Alberta?

Conceptualizing Youth

Although this thesis focuses on youth who engage in progressive activism, it is important to note that not all youth are progressive. Young people in Canada are increasingly participating in right-leaning, nationalist politics. This is exemplified by an Abacus Data poll that found that 50% of youth ages 18 to 29 who were polled indicated their intent to vote Conservative in the next federal election, compared to 27% who intend to vote Liberal and 14% who intend to vote NDP (Coletto, 2026). My focus on progressive youth activism therefore only reflects the scope of this study and should not be taken to mean that all youth activism is inherently progressive. Recognizing this is essential for understanding youth as a socially and politically diverse category.

It is also important to consider how the category of ‘youth’ is not equally accessible to all young people. In “Act Your Age!: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence” Nancy Lesko (2013) demonstrates that dominant constructions of adolescence center white, heterosexual boys, rendering racialized and gender-diverse young people as outside the normative boundaries of ‘youth’. This means that the social protections, and cultural assumptions associated with ‘youth’, such as innocence, are often inaccessible to racialized and gender-diverse young people. Ursula Moffitt and Leoandra Onnie Rogers (2022) argue that racial interpretations of youth shape developmental categories which frame racialized young people as more responsible, more threatening, and generally older. This dynamic is echoed in Rebecca Epstein, Jamila J. Blake, and Thalia González’s (2017) study “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood” which explores how Black girls are perceived as less innocent, more adult-like, and in less need of protection than their white peers. This uneven recognition of youth is also evident in Jessica Taft’s (2011) research which considers how girls’ activism is shaped by gendered

expectations of care and responsibility, limiting their ability to be recognized as youthful in the same way as their male peers. These insights highlight that youth is not only a socially constructed category but one whose boundaries are produced through racialized and gendered power relations. Attending to this uneven distribution is important for understanding how the category of youth operates and who is permitted to claim it. Turning to definitions of youth further highlights the contested nature of what counts as ‘youth’.

Research varies in its definition of what ages constitute ‘youth’ (Della Volpe, 2021; Steinberg, 2018), often presenting an overlap between Millennial (1981-1996) and Zoomer (1997-2012) generations. Much of the research surrounding youth activism of the 1950s and 1960s considered youth activists as college-aged, exemplified in Cyril Levitt’s (1984) book *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties*. Levitt explores the increase in campus activism in the 1950s and 1960s through interviews with students in the United States, Canada, and West Germany. In his book *Rebel Youth: 1960s Labour Unrest, Young Workers, and New Leftist in English Canada*, Ian Milligan (2014) compares activism both on and off university and college campuses, arguing that they need to be considered as a single youth phenomenon. Importantly Milligan acknowledges that there is no “universal definition of ‘youth’” (p. 13). By exploring various understandings of youth, Milligan argues that youth was, and is, an “inherently unstable category for analysis”. This is echoed by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett’s (2007) research on “emerging adulthood”, a stage he proposes as between adolescence and full adulthood, which also points to arbitrary nature of the term youth. Specifically, Arnett argues that the term youth “suffers from the same problem as young adulthood, in that it has long been used to refer to a wide range of ages, from middle childhood (“youth organizations”) through the 30s” (p. 70).

Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang (2014) also acknowledge the convoluted nature of the term youth as it is “deployed in multiple ways” (p. 4). In their research, Tuck and Yang position youth as socially constructed, explaining that, “youth are those who society regards as underdeveloped people not quite ready for self-determination” (p. 4). This is also echoed by Jerusha Conner, Uyiosaa Elegon, and Alison K. Cohen’s (2024) introductory chapter of *Handbook on Youth Activism* which states that “youth is a social construct, delimited differently in different historical and geographical contexts” (pp. xx-xxi). This specific book is an edited selection of chapters by various authors who define youth differently based on the national policy parameters for the area they are considering. This includes such countries as Ukraine, South Asia, Chile, and South Africa.

“Youth power – youth movements: myth, activism, and democracy” by Lynda Stone (2021) also discusses youth as distinct from adults (pp. 249-251) but does not define either term. The term ‘youth’ is further convoluted through her discussion of both the March for Our Lives (MFOL) movement and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. MFOL was initiated by teenagers in Parkland, Florida while BLM was initiated through a July 2013 Facebook post by Alicia Garza reacting to “the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old unarmed black youth a year before in Sanford, Florida” (p. 256). Here, Stone defines youth as ‘teenagers’, but Alicia Garza would have been 32 years old when she made her Facebook post in 2013 (Iowa State University, 2024). If Stone is focusing on youth activism, and Garza’s post is considered to be a form of youth activism, “youth” would include those in their thirties. Stone acknowledges the age difference of those who started MFOL and BLM, suggesting that “the prior twentieth-century distinction of adolescent and young adults seems to disappear” (p. 257).

The federal state also uses varying age ranges for ‘youth’. For example, Canada’s first *State of youth report* names youth as those 15 to 29 years of age (State of Youth, 2021). In its *Environmental scan* (Doucette, 2010), the United Way of Calgary and Area presents a comprehensive list of youth age ranges employed by various Canadian federal government organizations. In this list, ages range and vary from 15 to 35, with departments such as Foreign Affairs and International Trade naming youth as between the ages of 18 and 35, while Statistics Canada considers youth as ages 16 to 23. The Government of Alberta also presents mixed age ranges for its definition of youth, with youth employment incentives catering to those ages 15 to 24 (De Jonge, 2025) while youth employment laws apply to those under 18 years of age (Government of Alberta, n.d.-b).

There is no singular or uniform definition of what constitutes the age of ‘youth’ across the studies which I reference in this thesis. When exploring scholarship pertaining to youth activism of the 1960s and 1970s, youth activists were largely considered as college-aged, likely because many of the activist movements of the 1960s took place or developed out of college and university campuses. More recent studies such as Gabriela Martinez Sainz and Amy Hanna’s (2023) study of the Friday’s for Future (FFF) movement—an international youth-led climate movement started in 2018 by Greta Thunberg in which youth started rallying and striking from school on Fridays in protest of political leaders lack of effort to combat the climate crisis—consider school age as “youth” and refer to FFF members as “children and young people”, but Martinez Sainz and Hanna never clearly define this distinction.

In her book *Activists Under 30*, Shirley R. Steinberg (2018) defends her choice to focus on activists under 30 based on the 1960s activist mantra, “*don’t trust anyone over 30*” (p. 3). Steinberg explains that,

the age designation stands to remind us of the capabilities and rights that youth have and their abilities to make a difference. It insists that youth should be encouraged and supported as they pave their way to adulthood, that they have an invested and inalienable right to participate in the future. That they *are* the future (p. 3).

From the student-led activism of the 1960s and 1970s, to the modern activism of the 21st century, the aforementioned articles illustrate that youth continue to fight for justice and a better future, recognizing multiple systems of power, their oppressive nature, and how they intersect and overlap.

The persistence of youth activism emerges alongside scholarship that notes the cultural shift in which the boundaries of adulthood have become unstable. In his exploration of the infantilization of the postmodern adult, Jacopo Bernardini (2014) emphasizes how the boundaries of adulthood have become blurred and that the infantilist adult, or, “kidult”, is “an archetype of an encouraged regression, to facilitate the promotion of goods which are only apparently addressed to young people and children” (p. 41), who are creations of the capitalist market. Bernardini explains that “in a society as frenetic and uncertain as the postmodern one, the individual manages to find stability in the memory of past experiences” (p.42). Bernardini correlated this to demographic shifts as the classic marks of entry into the adult age— such as a steady job, relationship, and income— have been gradually delayed (p. 46). According to Warren Clark’s research for Statistics Canada, “young adults in 2011 had gone through fewer transitions than the 1971 cohort had when it was the same age” (Clark, 2007). These transitions include “any of the five traditional bridges to adulthood: leaving school, leaving home, steady full-time work, conjugal unions and parenting” (Clark, 2007). More recent statistics suggests that in 2016, 34.7% of young adults ages 20 to 34 were still living with their parents, compared to 30.6% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2017), and the number of young adults aged 20 to 24 living in a couple had decreased from 36.4% in 1981 to 16.1% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012). Rates of

reproduction have also been delayed. In 1976 young adults reproduced at a rate of 1.83 children per birthing person at the average age of 26.7 years old. In 2024 the average birth rate has decreased to 1.25 children per birthing person at the average age of 31.8 years old. (Statistics Canada, 2024; Statistics Canada, 2025). This highlights how reaching the traditional markers of adulthood have been delayed when comparing today to the 1970s.

These delays in reaching the typical markers of adulthood, such as having a steady job, being in a conjugal relationship, and having children, are therefore causing a decrease in the number of adolescent or younger youth for capitalism to market to (Bernardini, 2014). The marker has acknowledged young adult's "massive presence in the population" (p. 43) and a decrease in younger youth due to a decrease in birth rates as facts that mark young adults as the most profitable target for economic gain. The market has thus adjusted to these delays by utilizing the *nostalgia effect* (p. 42), remaking movies and video games from Millennials' childhoods as well as creations such as Harry Potter World at Universal Studios. Bernardini coins these infantilized youth as "kidults" and suggests that they are adults who chase "the standardized trends and desires of the youths" who suppresses the variety, the singularity and the distinctiveness of his own persona in favor of the extraordinarily universal youth culture" (p. 52). This literature review has therefore pushed me to reconsider how I understand youth as a social category, especially considering how fluid its boundaries have become.

Given the unsettled and contested nature of how to define 'youth', it was challenging to know how to think about this category. In my experience and based on the literature review above, individuals aged 18 to 35, including myself, are reaching the expected markers of adulthood later in life. However, it is important to emphasize that the timing and experience of these transitions are unevenly distributed across social groups. Existing scholarship on

“waithood” and adulthood shows that these delays are often shaped by structural inequalities and can be more constrained or precarious for working-class, economically marginalized, and racialized population. Of my friends, who are predominantly white and upper/middle class like myself, few are married and even fewer have children. We are just starting to buy homes, before marriage, and children, for many of us, likely will not come until our mid 30s, if at all. These observations are positioned within a homogenous social network and should not be taken as representative of broader patterns across all social groups or young adults. For this reason, I think that the spirit of ‘youth’ is sticking around longer within my immediate social context. Therefore, this thesis defines youth as being between the ages of 18 to 35. I have chosen this age range not only based on my personal experience as a member of this age category, but based on how different agencies within the Government of Canada define youth. For example, while Statistics Canada’s “Youth in Transition Survey” defines youth as ages 15 to 28, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada’s “International Youth Program” considers youth to be ages 18 to 35 (Doucette, 2010). Moreover, given the hurdles and complications I would likely have faced in ethics approval, I did not include people below the consenting age of 18 for my interviews.

While an age-based boundary was necessary to establish clear inclusion criteria for participants, I do not intend to treat youth as a fixed biological stage or a self-evident identity. Rather, youth is understood by this thesis as a social, political, and structural position, shaped by historical expectations and by unequal relations of race and gender. As scholars such as Tuck and Yang (2014), Arnett (2007), and Bernardini (2014) suggest, youth should be understood as a socially-produced category with boundaries that shift in relation to economic conditions, institutional power, and cultural norms. The earlier discussion of racialized and gendered constructions of youth further illustrates that access to this category is not evenly distributed. In

this sense, my use of the term ‘youth’ functions as a category for analysis rather than a claim about identity. Interview participants were not asked whether they personally identified as ‘youth’, nor did they raise the term themselves as this was not the central interest of my research. The use of ‘youth’ in this study therefore reflects my effort to analyze a shared structural positioning rather than imposing a uniform identity on the participants.

On Activism and Being an Activist

I entered this research with my own ideas of what being an activist entailed, but intentionally did not define the term in order to keep the door open to any and all people who wanted to participate. Regardless of this intentionality, much like Emily, a 33-year-old climate justice and education reform activist from Calgary, I had this perception of an activist as “chaining themselves to trees”. I also viewed activists as “having signs up and being right outside city hall”, like Azi, a 25-year-old harm reduction activist and advocate for the unhoused in Wetaskiwin. When asked, “Do you consider yourself an activist?”, most of the interviewees suggested that they did not merit this identity. As our conversations continued, the interview participants challenged ideas of what the ‘ideal’ activist should look like, suggesting alternative definitions of what an activist or activism is. Participants also proposed alternative titles, and in so doing, dispelled concrete ideas that limit who can be an activist and what counts as activism. As the interview participants will demonstrate, activist and activism are extremely nuanced. For this reason, I do not intend to provide a definition of ‘activist’ and/or ‘activism’. In this thesis, ‘activist’ is treated not as a fixed identity, but as a contested and negotiated category, shaped by visibility and legitimacy. This section will therefore serve as a guide that allows my participants’ words to frame the reader’s understanding of activism as they read my thesis.

In her article “‘I’m Not an Activist, Though I’ve Done a Lot of it’: Doing Activism, Being Activist and the ‘Perfect Standard’ in a Contemporary Movement”, Chris Bobel (2007) argues that “the perfect standard” associated with the concept of being an ‘activist’ places the identity out of reach for many social movement participants (p. 150). When confronted with the “perfect standard” of the activist identity, many consider themselves unworthy of the title, but still preserve it for more seasoned activists.

Katie, a 34-year-old queer rights activist, exemplifies this in her response to the question, “Do you consider yourself an activist?”:

I think when we think activist, there’s a very specific notion, and not that I agree that that should be so limiting, but a picture of someone with a bullhorn leading the charge, someone at a big, very visible event. So, I guess when I think of activism I think about high visibility, and that’s not to say that those movements and those efforts don’t have incredible power and incredible meaning, it’s just not the world that I walk in. It’s just not where my skill set lies. I think it takes all shapes. I would call myself an advocate, like I mentioned, because I’m not doing the highly visible work. I’m more behind the scenes trying to shift and advocate for transformative change in this institution and through this institution more broadly [...] Universities in Canada, we all listen to each other and when someone’s doing something we think is cool we try to do it too or we try to piggy back off of them. So, my hope is that by the work I’m doing here I can have a broader impact throughout post-secondary and academia just by the fact that we all set an example for each other. But yeah, I tend to use the word advocate because it lends to more of my type of work but if we are using activist as an umbrella, I would say I do maybe fall in that space from time to time.

Katie’s reflection highlights how traditional images of activism and the perfect standard can obscure the quieter, institution-based work that also drives meaningful social change. Yet Katie holds in tension her self-identification as an ‘advocate’ with those moments that she falls into an ‘activist’ space “from time to time.”

Like Katie, many interview participants present alternative titles for the work they do. For example, Azi, a 25-year-old harm reduction and unhoused advocate, describes herself as a micro-activist, explaining that “I have a voice, I just don’t know who all listens to that voice.”

Similarly, Маки, a 25-year-old climate justice activist in Edmonton, describes themselves as an organizer, and explains that “what I do is activism, but I am someone who likes to stay behind the scenes.” Other alternatives to the title ‘activist’ were provided such as “social justice warrior”, proposed by Sam, a 35-year-old Free Palestine activist in Edmonton, and “humanist”, proposed by Marko, a 32-year-old queer rights activist in Lethbridge. Four of the participants identified with the activist title but were reluctant to do so, and felt the need to provide ample justification for this. Dayn exemplifies this best; when asked if they considered themselves an activist, they responded:

Honestly, genuinely, before I saw your [recruitment] post about it, no. I did not consider myself an activist, but I thought about it. First of all, I saw it, and I thought “Oh, I want to help! Oh, but I’m not an activist, so I guess I can’t help.” And then I sat with it for a minute, and I realized that activism is so much more than going to every single protest. It’s so much more than actively reaching out and going door to door to strangers for signatures. It is doing the work behind the scenes where you can. It’s filling out the petitions when they come up and I started to realize that “Yeah, I am an activist in my own little way, and I do what I can.”

Here, we see Dayn dispel the notion of the ‘perfect standard’ as they justify how the work they do qualifies them for the title of activist. At the same time, Dayn still indicated their reluctance to fully embrace the title.

Rebecca, a 23-year-old queer rights and education reform activist, does something similar when discussing her activist work:

Yeah. I do [consider myself an activist]. I’m sure a lot of people wouldn’t but I think being an activist is an attitude almost. I will stand up for queer rights pretty much no matter what space I’m in, within reason. Taking personal safety into account for sure. I don’t let people get away with saying hateful things and I will consistently stand up against that and I think that is what makes me an activist. I also dedicate my academic work to hoping for social justice, trying to write things that will get us one step closer to social justice or something. I do dedicate a lot of my life right now to working towards that, so I think that’s what makes me an activist, even though I’m not doing typical on the ground activism work.

Again, we see the reluctance to fully take on the title of activist, as Rebecca acknowledges that others might not see her as one and that she might not be doing what is typically considered “on the ground activism work.”

The distinction between activist and activism is important to note in these conversations. Bobel (2007) also points to this distinction, explaining that there is a difference between “doing” activism and “being” an activist, and that one can “do” activism without “being” an activist, where an alignment between personal and collective identity is not necessarily crucial to participate in a social movement (pp.148-149). Bobel’s distinction between “doing activism” and “being an activist” is particularly useful for my research, as it aligns with my recruitment poster’s (Appendix B) use of the term ‘activism’ and not ‘activist’, recruiting those participating in activism rather than those identifying with the activist label. Bobel’s arguments ring true as I considered how my participants confront the questions of “Are you an activist?”.

Katie specifically acknowledges that she has “tussled with that concept of ‘what makes an activist?’ Can anyone be an activist or is activism something that we do rather than identify as?” Similarly, Маки makes the distinction between “doing” versus “being” as they identify as an organizer, but describe their work as activism:

Activism is advocating for certain issues and on certain topics, providing education, content, and resources. That to me is activism and so, me being in the position of providing resources to people and sharing information. I wouldn’t be offended if somebody called me an activist but I just wouldn’t introduce myself as one.

Маки goes on to explain that their reluctance to identify as an activist comes from wanting to maintain a level of anonymity. This offers them protection against the infighting they have witnessed on social media surrounding the idea of the perfect activist.

B, a 27-year-old harm reduction activist and advocate for Lethbridge’s homeless population, explicitly acknowledges the distinction between *doing* activism and *being* an activist,

refusing to take on the label of activist because of the perfect standard it is often associated with.

B explains as follows:

I'm not a huge fan of labels. For example, my dating bio, I wouldn't say "I'm an activist." I think it used to but now it just reads like, "I do a lot of community service" because I think there's a lot of different ideas around activism and some of them are holding a sign at a protest, some are arguing with people online, and I think the kind of person that I want to be is somebody who helps other people survive.

Rather than presenting an alternative title, B presents an alternative definition of activism describing what he does as "community service." This echoes Bobel's distinction between "being" an activist and "doing" activism and extends activism past the expectations of "holding a sign at a protest" or "arguing with people online." This refusal of a label also allows B to continue his work supporting the homeless community without feeling as though there is a standard that he must achieve, or that he must act or do his community service work in a certain way to achieve the title of 'activist'.

Bobel's "perfect standard" and the interview participants' words help shape the understanding of activism and activist that I use throughout my thesis. Although I primarily refer to the interview participants as activists through this thesis, this should not be read as imposing an identity they did not claim, but rather as an umbrella term for individuals engaged in sustained practices of social and political change.

Impulse for the Research

I did not consider myself an activist when I chose this thesis topic. My initial idea for this research was to focus on the role of empathy in activism, and how empathy translates into action. This motivation came from a place of feeling empathy for those experiencing social injustice, yet simultaneously feeling as though I was not doing enough about it. In Lethbridge, for example, I feel immense empathy for the large, unhoused population and the lack of aid and resources

offered to them due to the conservative lens of the city and province more broadly which views their struggles as individual and not systemic. Regardless of this empathetic feeling, the thought that I could have any impact in changing this felt impossible. I recognized the suffering felt by those who experience racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression, but did not know how I could possibly help. Watching these injustices made me feel sad and angry, but I did not know how to channel these emotions into something useful.

Growing up in Lethbridge, I think the way our city addresses our large, unhoused population allows me to be aware of the problem but not feel like I need to do anything about it. This is achieved through the dismantling of visible encampments, starting The Watch, a volunteer downtown patrol that aims to “provide a highly visible presence, deterring negative behaviour and crime” (The Watch, n.d.), and treating homelessness as an individual failing. Although I understand how it is systemic, the City’s and Lethbridge Police Service’s efforts to hide the problem from public view allow to me ignore it. Since the unhoused population is largely confined to the downtown area, and I live further south, it is not something that I see or must acknowledge often. When I do see it, I can keep driving or walk away. I’ve also never known anyone directly impacted and therefore it has never impacted me in a way that is close to home. This all makes it quite easy to turn a blind eye, but still say that I care, without doing anything; actively disregarding how I am implicated in these systems of oppression. At the same time, I am aware that discussions of “unhoused populations” in Lethbridge and across Alberta are shaped by the racialized and colonial histories of the region.

As Jesse Thistle (2017) argues in “Definitions of Indigenous Homelessness”, homelessness in Canada cannot be understood simply as a lack of housing but must be situated within the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism, land dispossession, and the disruption of

Indigenous kinship networks. In Alberta, reference to “homeless” or “unhoused” populations often functions as coded language for Indigenous peoples, reflecting deeply ingrained structures of colonial violence. In this thesis, I use the terms “unhoused” and “homeless” in alignment with my interview participants, Azi and B, who work in frontline services and use “unhoused” and “homeless” respectively, while also acknowledging the colonial and racialized context that shapes how these terms are used in Alberta. Recognizing the colonial and racialized structures that shape homelessness in Lethbridge also forces me to confront my own emotional responses to what I witness. While scholars such as Thistle help me understand the structural conditions that produce homelessness, Elizabeth V. Spelman (1997) helps me understand the ethical implications of my reactions to them.

Spelman suggests that feelings of empathy without action dissolve into pity (p. 83). Rather than taking the action to help the sufferer, pity reinforces power imbalances between the sufferer and the pitier. Pity therefore serves to make me feel better about the suffering I witness, rather than aid the sufferer. Spelman describes pity as a “luxury of the comfortable”, as it allows me to feel moral without confronting the structures that are producing the suffering (p.68). Rather than attending to the feelings of the sufferer, pity allows me to focus on my own feelings, separating the suffering from its cause and reinforcing this separation.

Through conversations with my friends of similar ages, I have found that they experience similar feelings. When discussing the conservative politics of Alberta, my friends and I often feel hopeless— as if nothing we could do would help change the social inequalities resulting from conservative policies that individualize struggle. These include the refusal to declare an opioid crisis or invest in more affordable housing and rehabilitative services. Маки expressed having the same experience with their friends in our interview:

I think that the anger feeds the hope because you can get angry and feel despair, and this is what I see so many of my friends doing. They kind of go down this spiral of “It doesn’t matter. Nothing matters. They’re never going to listen” and I’m like, “Well, it’s worked in the past because people were loud, people were vocal, people were pushing back.” As much as I hate the Roman Empire, Rome wasn’t built in a day so to say.

Seeing how activists push through these feelings of despair and hopelessness made me assume that they find ways to use feelings such as empathy and anger as fuel for their activist efforts.

This assumption is what sparked my interest in researching this topic. For me personally, I feel empathy for those suffering and anger towards those causing this suffering or actively ignoring it. The problem is that rather than using those feelings to fuel me, I was letting them drag me down. A large part of this is due to my privilege as an upper middle class white woman. I can easily turn a blind eye as it does not impact me or anyone close to me directly. That being said, a lot of activists have the same privileges (if not more) and are not directly impacted by the causes they advocate for. My disconnect between emotion and action therefore cannot just be about privilege and distance. The motivation for this research was therefore driven in part by the thought that there has to be something I’m missing— something I’m not understanding or not utilizing that activists are— and perhaps a deeper understanding of how emotions translate into action can help overcome my feelings of defeat and lack of action.

As someone who loves my home province of Alberta and wants to see it become a more progressive and supportive place for all people, I believe that understanding what sustains activism is crucial, as activists are the driving force that can create (and have created) progressive change that can help overcome social injustices derived from conservative policies. That is why I am interested in how emotions are involved in sustaining activism as well as what resources are required.

Through interviews with youth activists in Alberta, my research seeks to better understand what sustains their activist work. I interviewed ten people who self-identify as participants in some form of progressive activism. While youth political engagement in Alberta spans a wide ideological spectrum, this project focuses specifically on progressive youth activism. This includes advocating for queer rights, climate justice, harm reduction, and educational reform, to name a few. Participants were primarily from Alberta's larger cities (Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge), with one from Wetaskiwin. Ages ranged from 19 to 35, with nine participants having or working towards a post-secondary education. Further details about each participant can be found in Table 1 (See page 58). Each interview was between 45 and 90 minutes in duration. Although the option was presented to conduct the interviews in person for those residing in Lethbridge, all ten interviews took place over Zoom. The interview with Azi was a unique case where the first half of our interview was conducted over Zoom while the second half was conducted by email as our internet connection had failed. The participants had the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and, using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, I employed discourse analysis as the primary method to interpret the interviews (see more in Chapter Two).

My thesis finds that emotions function as relational and political forces that play a critical role in sustaining activism. While sadness reveals and affirms activist recognitions of wrongdoing, anger transforms this recognition into action through motivational and visionary energy. Hope further sustains activists by providing an anchor based in a future-oriented vision of change, while empathy and love create connection, bindings activists to those impacted by the injustices they are working to overcome. This thesis reveals that the work that emotions do is not enough to sustain activism over time. Activist sustainment is also reliant on the availability of discretionary resources— such as time and money— and

the ongoing allocation of these resources to activist commitments and the demands of everyday life. Community and privilege are also necessary resources to sustain activism as they allow activists to absorb risk, withdraw when needed, and have the ability to provide a sense of belonging that supports persistence. My research showcases that activists are sustained through the work that emotions do, the availability of discretionary resources, the power of unearned privilege, and the support of community.

Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter has given a brief overview of my research, contextualized my definition of youth and definition of activist and activism, and provided an explanation of the impulse for this research. Chapter One, a literature review, situates the research project and provides context for the gaps I hope to fill in existing scholarship. In Chapter Two, I will consider my positionality and present my theoretical framework, methodology, and elaborate on my chosen methods. Chapter Three, my first analysis chapter, considers the work that emotions do to sustain activism. Chapter Four considers the resources needed to conduct activist work and how these intersect, followed by a Conclusion that offers reflections on the thesis and its findings.

CHAPTER ONE: Literature Review

My literature review will provide a review of scholarship pertaining to youth activism generally and in Alberta, and scholarship on what sustains youth activism. My first section provides a lay of the land on how youth activism is being considered in terms of age range. My second section highlights the limited focus on Alberta youth specifically. The third section dives into the research related to my broader research question and is subsectioned into Material Conditions, Emotions, and Relationships and Community. This chapter highlights the scholarly conversations my research contributes to by considering how theorizing emotion and resources can be applied to the question of what sustains progressive youth activists in Alberta, and why the conversation of youth should encompass those aged 18 to 35.

1.1 Youth Activism

Throughout his aforementioned book, Cyril Levitt (1984) highlights how universities were “visible strongholds” (p. 46) of progressive activism, as they provided a location to practice revolt within a space that cultivated critical thinking and questioning. The issue with only considering university students as ‘youth’ is that these students had a certain level of privilege which allowed them to attend these institutions. Levitt explains that the students he interviewed for his study were “acutely aware of their relatively privileged positions” (p. 4). Levitt’s analysis of Canada is the most limited of the three countries he considers. Levitt argued that Canada’s activist efforts were smaller scale in the sixties, and often influenced by happenings in the United States such as the civil rights movement (p. 47). This connection between Canada and the United States is important to consider as 50 years later, we still see their politics bleeding into and influencing each other. This is exemplified by the Alberta Separatists meeting with American State Department officials to discuss possible

support if Alberta were to separate from Canada (Harvey, 2026). It is also exemplified by President Donald Trump's threats of 100% tariffs on Canadian goods if Canada were to make a trade deal with China (Steven, 2026) . These examples emphasize how interconnected the two countries are, a context that also shaped the emergence of the New Left student movement in both nations.

Much of the literature on progressive youth activism of the 1960s focuses on the New Left student movement, a wave of youth-led political activism that was driven largely by university students who were dissatisfied with traditional politics and wanted to challenge social, political, and economic systems that they saw as unjust. Levitt states that the New Left movement was a “phenomenon which belonged to the decade of the sixties; it was born with it, just as it died with it. It was a movement of youth led by students for the universities and colleges” (p. 7). Regardless of its suggested death, Levitt asserts that “the general political and social commitment to the New Left survived in different forms,” (p. 9) which he argues is evident in the activist efforts of the 1970s and 1980s.

This survival is exemplified by the work of Kevin Brushett (2020) on Canadian activism from 1965 to 1975. Like Levitt (1984), Brushett (2020) also has a large focus on university student activist work. Specifically, he discusses the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA), a prominent Canadian New Left organization in the 1960's, and the Company for Young Canadians (CYC), a federal initiative designed to engage youth in community development and social action projects across Canada. Brushett argues that many young people were skeptical of CYC as they were not sure that real social change could be funded by the government (p. 6). Much of what these groups were fighting for still focused on the social issues that were of interest to the New Left of the earlier 1960s. As an example, Brushett discusses the first worldwide Earth Day in 1970, which emphasized how “the degradation of the environment

became one of the most powerful symbols of the exploitative character of modern capitalist and technocratic societies” (p. 5). Brushett discusses the Ecology Caravan of 1971, an old school bus decorated with flowers and peace symbols and retrofitted to burn propane. This caravan was used by six Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC) summer workers who traveled 2,700 miles around British Columbia in ten weeks, camping and raising awareness of environmental degradation (p. 14).

Although Levitt (1984) claims universities were a “visible stronghold” (p. 46) of counter-culture, he acknowledges that it was not confined to campuses but developed in the major cities of those countries he examined: Toronto and Montreal in Canada, New York and San Francisco in the United States, and Berlin and Munich in Germany (p. 46). Levitt asserts that “the new bohemia reached out to the middle-class youth and seized hold of it even in the middle of suburbia” (p. 46). This argument expands the understanding of youth activism in the 1960s as not confined to those in post-secondary education, but to youth outside of university campuses as well. When comparing this to contemporary activism which relies heavily on technology and forms of social media that did not exist in the mid-twentieth century (which will be discussed later in this literature review), it is understandable why so much literature focuses on university and college campuses. Without social media to connect young people, these campuses were places where young people were the most highly concentrated and able to share their messages, organize, and mobilize.

In his book, *Fight: How Gen Z is Channelling Their Fear and Passion to Save America*, John Della Volpe (2021) explored how those born in the late 1990s through the early 2000s, coined Gen Z, remain motivated in their activism in the United States when so much seems to be going wrong around them including such crises as the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001,

the 2008 global financial crisis, and the global COVID-19 pandemic and increased police brutality in the early 2020s. In the face of such turmoil and ongoing struggles for equity, Della Volpe argues that “Generation Z wasn’t looking for pity. Gen Zers were not retreating from the reality in front of them. They were ready to engage directly on these issues— the underlying elements of what was stifling their generation. They were looking to fight” (p. 7). At a time that has seen increased socioeconomic division, Della Volpe also notes that these Zoomers were not thinking of themselves, but of others who were being impacted more severely, arguing that they were raised to be uncommonly empathetic (p. 13).

Through his interviews, Della Volpe investigates what unites these young Americans in their fight for justice. Answers varied but seemed to always come back to a sense of fear or worry about the future. In an interview with nursing student Katie from Illinois, Della Volpe notes how vast this sense of fear is for Zoomers. Katie claims that the fear that unites them comes from many facets: “Let’s see, fear of death. Fear of our rights being infringed upon. Fear of the future for our kids. Fear for our family. Fear for our health” (p. 32). This is echoed in an interview with Chris, a college student from Kentucky claiming that what brings Zoomers together is “being afraid and paranoid of ab. . . so . . . lute . . . ly everything” (p. 33). Chris goes on to explain that American Zoomers have been taught to fear for their lives because at any moment their life could end due to the lack of gun regulations and the subsequent increase in gun-related deaths at schools and clubs (p. 33). A biology student highlights this difference in the role of fear between her generation and that of her parents as follows: “An older generation would not understand walking into a classroom and thinking about how easy it would be for someone to shoot it up. The same daily weight on an adult’s shoulders over bills or taxes is what

children feel about living or dying” (p. 33). When fear becomes life or death, Zoomers have no choice but to fight for change.

Much like Della Volpe, Shirley R. Steinberg (2018) emphasizes the need to listen to youth and amplify their voices. As such, her work shines a spotlight on youth activist work taking place around the world, as she argues that their work has largely been “ignored, ridiculed, marginalized, and feared... the voices of youth are often discounted” (p. 1). Steinberg’s book is structured into two sections. The first, “Global Youth Activists”, contains chapters discussing specific activists from around the world working on a variety of different issues. These activists, for example, include Kamilia Manaf in Indonesia, working on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transexual, intersex, and queer (LGBTTIQ) rights (p. 69) and Tavi Gevinson in the United States, working on empowering teenage girls (p. 32). The second section, “Youth Voices”, contains chapters written by youth activists discussing their activist work and why it matters.

Much like Steinberg, Jerusha Conner (2024) highlights the importance of studying how youth are mobilizing for social change globally. Conner’s book, *Handbook on Youth Activism*, provides a comprehensive examination of contemporary youth activism that combines the voices of scholars, researchers, and youth activists themselves. Conner considers the invisible labour associated with activism, the diversity of activism globally, and how youth activism is impacting institutions and broader social structures. While Conner provides a wide-ranging view of where and how youth activism occurs, other scholars have considered the internal dynamics that sustain young activists’ engagement over time. In “Scaffolding Collective Hope and Agency in Youth Activist Groups: ‘I Get Hope Through Action’”, Karen Nairn et al. (2025) explore how young activists’ participation in collective action allows them to maintain political engagement.

Drawing on qualitative research with youth activists ages 18 to 35, the authors argue that hope is an outcome of activism, emerging through shared action and mutual support. This process of “scaffolding” hope helps young people build agency in the face of political uncertainty. Nairn et al. highlight how hope is built in activist groups by creating a space where young people can imagine alternative futures, persist, and sustain their engagement over time (p. 432).

While Narin et al. focused on the internal dynamics that sustain youth engagement, other scholars examine how broader societal narratives shape the way youth activism is understood and valued. Lynda Stone (2021) echoes Steinberg’s (2018) argument that youth voices are often ignored and marginalized despite the celebration of young people as agents of change. Stone argues that democratic systems often operate through what she calls the myth of “youth power”— where youth are celebrated as the future of democracy while simultaneously excluded from political engagement in the present. Democratic systems justify limiting youth participation in political processes by discounting their activism as naïve and based in emotion and not reason. This myth of youth power helps explain why youth activism is often dismissed, as Steinberg (2018) suggests (p. 1), even when young people such as Greta Thunberg demonstrate sustained political engagement. Stone ultimately calls for a reconsideration of youth as political participants in the present, and not just the future (p. 259).

A big shift from activism of the 1960s through to today is the use of the internet as a tool for activism. Sainz and Hanna’s (2023) research, for example, focuses on youth digital activism in their consideration of the Fridays for Future movement (FFF). The FFF is a youth climate justice initiative started by Greta Thunberg, a grade nine student who skipped school on Fridays to protest outside the Swedish parliament, urging action against the climate crisis (p. 117). Sainz and Hanna explain that what was unique about this protest in comparison to earlier protests was

its coordination and facilitation through social media. At the height of COVID-19, the FFF protests had to be moved to an online format. This allowed for the FFF movement to reach beyond the borders of Sweden and to mobilize collective action globally (p. 132). As climate change is a global issue, social media and technology have created an additional tool of protest that can mobilize youth globally around shared interests. As such, Sainz and Hanna argue that the forms of political mobilization that digital technologies allow for are key for young people to counter marginalization and exclusion that often limits their ability to participate in political discourse as active citizens (p. 119).

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2014) also focus on social media as a tool for protest and mobilization. In their book *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change*, a collection of essays that emphasize the complexity of researching youth resistance, they highlight the need for a multi-dimensional approach that considers new ways of understanding and engaging with youth activism. The book challenges dominant narratives of youth activism as spontaneous and symbolic, arguing that it is strategically organized with intent and purpose. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, Tuck and Yang showcase how change is conceptualized in youth movements. They reference a 2006 study of how social media and text messaging was used to mobilize immigration rights that found that said mobilization was quite slow despite how fast these tools make the organizing appear (p. 16). This finding complicates the assumption that digital tools automatically produce rapid mass mobilization. However, Tuck and Yang suggest that once these pathways are built, the second time the movement mobilizes, it is done more efficiently and faster, sustaining participation. Much like Stone (2021), Tuck and Yang suggest that youth organizing has been mistakenly characterized as spontaneous, when it is in fact intentional and continuous (p. 16). In this way, they argue that youth activists organize with

purpose and their activism is built through ongoing relational labour. Tuck and Yang reframe youth activism as a deliberate practice of resistance rather than a spontaneous byproduct of digital connectivity.

This type of intentional digital mobilization is evident in the protests after the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police department in May of 2020. George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, died after a police officer knelt on his neck for over nine minutes during an arrest. The incident was captured on video and shared online (BBC News, 2020). Its wide distribution sparked global outrage prompting protests against police brutality and systemic racism. As Della Volpe (2021) explains, the response from Gen Z was immediate and vast:

Within hours of Floyd's death, a righteous movement, led by Generation Z for civil rights, equality, and justice was reenergized. Within weeks, at least twelve million Americans— more than half of which were under thirty years old— took to the streets and attended over forty-seven hundred demonstrations covering almost half of the counties in the United States. (pp. 92-93)

In his study of Gen Z activists, Della Volpe also discusses the role of social media and considers it essential to young Americans as it shapes their thoughts and ability to think critically (p. 117). Considering how much time young people spend on social media networks such as Instagram, X, or Myspace and Facebook in the early 2000s and 2010s, it is no wonder they have found a way to make it a tool for mobilization. Social media is also a powerful tool for information dissemination that can be used to teach young people about the systems of power and oppression which impact them, and how they can stand up for their own rights and the rights of others.

This recognition of social media as a site of youth political engagement is echoed by Jennifer Earl, Thomas V. Maher and Thomas Elliott (2017). In their article “Youth, Activism, and Social Media”, the authors argue that youth of the twenty-first century are an important category for analysis as they are not disengaged, as some may wrongfully assume, but they are engaging

in new ways when compared to youth of the twentieth century (p. 1). They suggest that youth is a group that should be studied independently because of how they mobilize differently and how they will often start their own youth-centered organizations over joining adult-directed socialization like youth advisory councils.

Al Liou and Ioana Literat (2020) also believe that youth are an important group for analysis in discussions of activism because of their unique use of the internet. In their study “We Need You to Listen to Us: Youth Activist Perspectives on Intergenerational Dynamics and Adult Solidarity in Youth Movements”, Liou and Literat employ the theory of adultism to explore youth perspectives on their own activism in relation to adult allyship. The authors explain that adultism is “the oppression experienced by . . . young people at the hands of adults and adult-produced/adult tailored systems” (p. 4665), which rewards youth obedience and punishes youth rebellion. This suggests that adultism may be a factor that impacts youths’ decision to start their own youth-led organizations. Liou and Literat go on to argue that one of the largest barriers to youth and adult solidarity and allyship is differences in internet use. As I have already explored, the internet and social media more specifically are an important method of connection for mobilization and information dissemination for youth activists. Liou and Literat claim that for youth, the most common characteristic of a good ally is listening with empathy (p. 4675). In their interview with youth activist Simi, she explains that most of her activist work would not be possible without her phone and the internet, which is difficult for her parents to understand. As such, Liou and Literat argue that adults and parents more specifically would support young people’s activism better if they took the time to understand how the internet and social media are vital to their activist work (p. 4663).

Liou and Literat acknowledge that modern youth activism not only takes place on digital platforms but is just as active in physical spaces (p. 4334). The protests of the 1960s echo in the demonstrations that emerged after the murder of George Floyd, where activists mobilized through collective action and street protests. Taking to the streets is not a new phenomenon, but it is more easily mobilized today because of social media. These types of mobilizations historically and contemporarily include marches, rallies, hunger strikes, community organizations, and political education workshops (p. 4662) as well as other forms of physical protest.

This relationship between digital tools and on-the-ground organizing is exemplified through the organizing and mutual aid networks in Minneapolis during increased presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol agents in December of 2025. Communities are protecting their most vulnerable members who are choosing to stay in their homes for safety by volunteering to patrol school grounds, delivering food, and doing laundry for those who do not have access to their own laundry machines. For those who have been detained, mutual aid organizations are taking donations of jackets for those being released from detention centers in the winter cold as well as transportation home, including donations of airline miles to help with flights for those who have been sent to detention centers further away (Copperud, 2026). Information about how to contribute to mutual aid is being shared through social media feeds, digital donations platforms such as GoFundMe and Venmo, and websites such as *standwithminnesota.com*, created specifically to aggregate mutual aid opportunities (Copperud, 2026). Other than its unique ability to mobilize quickly, social media also provides the unique ability for protest through lockdowns, as demonstrated by the FFF movement during COVID-19. Taken together, this scholarship illustrates the evolving forms and motivations of youth activism

across time and borders— context that sets the stage for how similar forces shape activist efforts in Alberta specifically.

1.2 Activism in Alberta

Trevor W. Harrison and Ricardo Acuña's (2023) book *Anger and Angst: Jason Kenney's Legacy and Alberta's Right*, provides important context for understanding Alberta's present political landscape during the UCP's first term in office (2019-2023). Although not specifically focused on activism, the book, in part, highlight the negative impact that the UCP have had on Alberta's young people, setting the stage for activism intended to combat UCP policies that go against progressive young peoples' values. For example, in Chapter nine, "Alberta's Brain Drain Redux: The Mitigation of Alberta's Youth Under the UCP," Richard E. Mueller explores how growing numbers of young Albertans are choosing to leave the province due to their dissatisfaction with the UCP policies, particularly cuts to public sectors employment and the accompanying wage decreases. Mueller argues that the UCP is driving out the same kinds of workers that it wants to attract— young professionals, who are highly educated and highly compensated such as medical physicians (p. 214). Mueller's predictions for future lose of young professionals in Alberta is evident today by a shortage of doctors across the province, exemplified by Lethbridge reporting that an estimated 40% of their population is without a family physician (Keenan, 2026).

More broadly, *Anger and Angst* emphasizes how the UCP government has created conditions of instability, austerity, and cultural polarization that disproportionately impact the lives of young Albertans, deepening their sense of political disappointment. This includes chapters that consider the UCP's failure to effectively address systemic racism (authored by Irfan Chaudhry), their disregard for LGBTQ+ autonomy in favour of parental rights policies (authored by Bridget Stirling), and their disregard for Alberta's environment

(authored by Laurie Adkin) and Indigenous peoples (authored by Yale D. Belanger and David R. Newhouse), to name a few. Across chapters, authors document how UCP policies have negatively impacted the public institutions that young people rely on, further contributing to their dissatisfaction. Harrison and Acuña also emphasize how Alberta's demographic transformation places the UCP out of alignment with the values and priorities of many young Albertans. Taken together, the essays suggest that young Albertans are increasingly alienated by a government that undermines their economic security, social values, and long-term prosperity in the province.

The current frustrations and political tensions explored in *Anger and Angst* are informed by a much longer history of conservatism in Alberta. The book *Bucking Conservatism: Alternative Stories of Alberta from the 1960s and 1970s*, edited by Leon Crane Bear, Larry Hannant, and Karissa Robyn Patton (2021) critically examines the view of Alberta as an ultra-conservative province and explores activism that counters this assumed political orientation. The introduction considers how this political stereotype was constructed and reproduced in public discourse, media narratives, and historical scholarship, arguing that framing Alberta as completely conservative overshadows the presence of progressive movements that make up a more complex political landscape. The book foregrounds the often-overlooked histories of progressive activists, organizers, and community members who challenged dominant political and social norms during the 1960s and 1970s. This includes chapters documenting the fight for Indigenous women's rights (authored by Corinne George), reproductive rights (authored by Karissa Robyn Patton), and climate justice (authored by Tom Redford), as well as stories from war resisters (authored by Baldwin Reichwein and PearlAnn Reichwein). This book is a treasure trove of stories that showcase that grassroots opposition to conservatism does exist in Alberta and that what is

actually lacking is awareness of it by the people of Alberta, Canada more generally, and writers and historians (p. xx).

Lois Harder (2003) also provides a historical analysis of activism in Alberta in her book *The State of Struggle: Feminism and Politics in Alberta*. Crane Bear, Hannant, and Patton (2021) acknowledge Harder's writing in their book as taking up where they left off in the 1970s and carrying on through the 1990s. They suggests that her work continues to support the argument that "resistance in Alberta has never ceased to flicker" (p. xix). While *Bucking Conservatism* presents a collection of stories that contradict Alberta's conservative reputation, Harder's (2003) work offers a political analysis of feminist organizing within the province's institutional landscape. Harder examines how provincial politics have constrained feminist activism overtime. In so doing, Harder acknowledges the conservative nature of the province and the barriers this creates for feminist activists fighting for change. By foregrounding the struggle between grassroots mobilization and state politics, Harder disrupts the narrative of Alberta as hostile to progressive change and instead demonstrates that resistance persists. She aims to use her analysis of feminist organizing in Alberta in the 1970s through the 1990s to highlight how sustained progressive organizing has long existed within this political environment and "disrupt prevailing views of the constancy of the province's conservatism" (p.1).

Gloria Filax (2014) also highlights conservative resistance in Alberta by providing numerous examples of queer activism in Alberta between 1900 and 2014 in her article "Queer Activism and the Severely Normal Agenda in Alberta, 1900-Present: A Continuing Saga". In doing so, she seeks to dismantle the assumed heteronormativity of the province by providing numerous examples of queer activism pushing back against the "severely normal" agenda; one that institutionalizes and reproduces heteronormativity and conservatism as the

dominant Alberta ideology through political and cultural discourse. Filax provides several examples throughout her article including Alberta Beef, a drag-king group formed in 2007 in Edmonton, that used their public performances to dismantle the assumed “dominant identity of straight masculinity” (p. 183) in the province, often exemplified by the cowboy. Alley Kat brewery in Edmonton also pushes back against the cowboy image by co-opting it for their Redneck beer, creating a label that depicts a “campy, queer, and gender ambiguous cowboy” (p. 178) rather than the severely normal depiction of a cowboy as a straight and hyper masculine. Alley Kat supports the queer community in Edmonton further by hosting fundraisers for Pride Week in Edmonton as well as other events as their former brewmaster Roxxie, a transgender woman, was heavily involved in Edmonton’s queer community.

Filax highlights more forms of queer activism in Alberta that are often overshadowed by dominant discourses of heteronormativity and conservatism. These include *The Fairy Tale Queer Art and Film Festival*, Calgary’s annual LGBTQ Film and Video event, and *Exposure*, Edmonton’s annual Queer Arts & Culture Festival. The Red Deer Museum has also advocated for queer rights by hosting a “curated display on the lives of rural gays and lesbians” (p. 185) regardless of backlash from the community and Red Deer MLAs. Filax also points to k.d. lang, an Albertan country singer and out lesbian, as a key figure in the disruption of dominant heteronormative narratives of Alberta. lang’s play on cowboy culture broke away from the province’s deeply rooted gender norms and presented alternative ways to be ‘female’, Albertan, and a cowboy, making her a symbolic activist for queer rights in Alberta (p. 180).

None of the aforementioned authors focus on youth activism specifically, but, rather, consider all forms of defying conservatism. The only chapter in *Bucking Conservatism* (2021) which does consider youth activism is Ken Novakowski’s chapter, “Daring to be Left

in a Social Credit Alberta: Recollections of a Young New Democratic Party Activist in the 1960s.” In this chapter, Novakowski discusses his work and experience as a young activist and member of the NDP in the 1960s. Novakowski argues that the Alberta NDP was able to reach beyond students on university and college campuses to include young workers and high school students as well (p. 161). By working to push the Alberta NDP further to the left of the political spectrum, Novakowski claims they were trying to make the party more appealing to young people (p. 163). When considering the youth of today Novakowski argues that the frustration they feel with today’s social issues largely stems from the capitalist system that has caused them to opt out of participating in the political process as they do not see how it could help solve their problems (p. 170). This is why he suggests that “it is equally essential today that the NDP offer clear progressive policies and strategies for [inequality, poverty, and climate crisis] and other critical issues in its election campaigns” (p. 170).

Literature pertaining to youth activism specifically in Alberta today is sparse, with much of the literature focusing on youth as school-aged. In his article “Social Justice Activism in the Heartland of Hate: Countering Extremism in Alberta” Darren E. Lund (2006), former high school teacher turned University of Calgary professor, acknowledges the conservative nature of Alberta, arguing that it is a comfortable place for those who are against the “ever-increasing diversity” of the country (p. 181). Much like Harder (2003) and Crane Bear, Hannant, and Patton (2021), Lund aims to highlight how the people of Alberta are fighting against the assumed conservatism of the province to create social change. His article does not consider youth activists individually, instead focusing on the Student and Teachers Opposing Prejudice (STOP), a program for teachers and students to combat discrimination in Alberta created by Lund during his high school teaching years at a Red

Deer high school (p. 186). As such, this article and much of Lund's work focuses on the adult and youth relationship in education, and how adults and youth can support each other in the fight against discrimination.

In his article "Forming Social Justice Projects: Student Activists Reflect on Coalition-Building", Lund (2003) conducted in-depth interviews with seven students from Western Canadian high schools, discussing their school-based activism and the challenges and successes of taking these efforts off-campus. Through this work, Lund acknowledges the need to engage with more young activists in discussions of school-based activism to "acknowledge their significant roles as leaders and valued informants in this area" (p. 24-25). Lund concludes that students involved in school-based coalitions are likely to participate in activism outside of school as well, arguing the importance of including justice coalitions in schools as they teach students skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking (p. 37).

In a Viewpoint article for the Alberta Teacher's Association, Lund (2015) reflects on Alberta's first gay-straight alliance formed in the 1990s out of the STOP program. Youth activism surrounding GSAs/QSAs in Alberta has deep roots in student-led heteronormative resistance. Lund recalls the two students responsible, Rachel and René, confronting the teachers and staff of Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School in Red Deer about the homophobia occurring in their school. As members of the STOP program, the students' advocacy for a safer and more supportive school environment led to the creation of Alberta's first GSA. The GSA went on to organize awareness campaigns, community-building events, and fostered acceptance for all students. This early example illustrates how GSAs emerged not only as supportive clubs but as youth-driven forms of activism in Alberta.

Research on queer and trans youth in Alberta further contextualizes why GSAs became necessary and how they evolved into key sites of activism. In their article “Getting an Education in Edmonton, Alberta: The Case of Queer Youth” André P. Grace and Kristopher Wells (2013) document how queer and trans students continue to contest heteronormative school cultures and to push for systemic change. Although protections surrounding sexual orientation exist in the Canadian Charter and provincial human rights legislation (SOURCE), Grace and Wells’ research highlights that schools remain sites of homophobia and transphobia with queer youth encountering mental, emotional and physical violence from other students, teachers, administration, and parents who oppose LGBTQ inclusion. While the authors frame LGBTQ youth as vulnerable, they also highlights how they are pushing back against their marginalization. Although the article does not directly analyze GSAs, the authors do list GSAs as an important site for teachers to mentor and support queer youth. They also encourage the Alberta Teacher’s Association to actively support ventures to create GSAs in schools (p. 145).

Through their examination of high-school students involved in LGBTQ activism, Tina Fetner and Athena Elafros (2015) highlight the positive impact of GSAs in schools. Through their study, the authors found that students in schools with and without GSAs experienced harassment based on their gender identities, but those with GSAs reported more support from teachers and administration compared to those without GSAs. This highlights the improvements that GSAs and the associated LGBTQ activism can bring to gender-diverse student quality of life. Their work reinforces that GSAs function as both protective and political spaces, enabling students to challenge heteronormativity within their schools.

Contemporary debates over “parental rights” in Alberta further illuminate the stakes of youth activism. In the Active History article “Listening to Youth: Historicizing & Challenging

Parental Rights Discourse” authors Derek Cameron, Karissa Patton, and Kristine Alexander (2026) consider how Alberta’s government’s recent expansion of “parental rights” policies expands adult control over youth autonomy, disproportionately harming queer and trans youth. The authors seek to foreground youth voices, which are often erased in debates about parental rights, and consider how these political narratives shape young people’s lived experiences. They argue that centering youth perspectives is essential for understanding the real consequences of policies that claim to “protect children” while restricting their access to safety, privacy, and care. This piece therefore positions queer and trans youth not as passive subjects, but as individuals whose rights, autonomy, and wellbeing must be taken seriously. When placed alongside the history and scholarship on GSAs, this work highlights how Alberta youth continue to mobilize—through GSAs, public testimony, and political engagement— to resist policies that undermine their autonomy and safety.

Although Alberta’s activist history is rich, scholarship that foregrounds the experience and contributions of youth activists in my chosen age range of 18 to 35 is sparse. Instead, most research highlights broader movements while leaving youth-led organizing largely unexplored or focuses on youth as teenagers. This literature review therefore underscores the need for more research that centers Alberta’s youth, which is a gap my thesis will contribute to filling. I now turn to scholarship that considers what sustains activism more generally.

1.3 Sustaining Activism

Current research on what sustains activism uses the term ‘sustain’ interchangeably with the terms ‘motivate’ (Craddock 2019; Shah & Khan, 2023; Kleres & Wettergren, 2017), ‘drive’ (Allam, 2018; Shah & Khan, 2023), ‘ignite’ (Forenza & Germak, 2015), and ‘retain’ (Bunnage,

2014). The various scholars who consider what sustains activism approach the question in different ways. As such, the answer to the question of how activism is sustained varies but largely centers on understanding what keeps activists involved in their respective movements. Emma Craddock's (2019) article, "What is the Point of Anti-Austerity Activism? Exploring the Motivating and Sustaining Emotional Forces of Political Participation", for example, seeks to understand how social movements are sustained during latent periods and what factors motivate individuals to participate in the movement. In contrast, Leslie A. Bunnage's (2014) article "Social Movement Engagement Over the Long Haul: Understanding Activist Retention" considers what sustains activism in terms of what strategies the physical movement or organization can use to retain activist participants, such as access to education or funds for their work to overcome the limits of their biographical availability. Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba (2023) take yet another approach in their book *Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care*, considering not only what sustains movements, but the importance of sustaining, "... our own well-being" (p. 201) in the process of mobilizing. This section will expand on the aforementioned scholars, as well as others, focusing on the most commonly addressed themes involved in sustaining activism: material conditions, emotions, and community and relationships.

1.3.1 Material Conditions

John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald's (1977) "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory" argues that movements rely on discretionary resources, such as money and time, to sustain their efforts rather than just shared grievances and a moral commitment to change. In their argument, movements are sustained by individuals who can donate their time, money, and labour to compensate for a lack of institutional funding. Movements are therefore more likely to fail when discretionary resources are lacking rather than

a lack of commitment to the cause. In other words, if individuals do not have the ability to allocate discretionary resources to the causes they care about, their moral commitment to a cause is not enough to sustain them.

Subsequent scholars have expanded the resource mobilization theory to emphasize that activist labour does not only include financial and organization resources, but also emotional and relational labour. In her book *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism & Social Change Across the America's* Jessica K. Taft (2011) highlights the extensive emotional and relational labour involved in sustaining youth activism. Specifically, Taft discusses mentoring peers, navigating interpersonal conflicts, and maintaining motivation as a collective in the face of dismissal from adults. Taft's research exemplifies that participation in activism often requires significant investment from youth activists who must constantly justify that their political engagement is legitimate.

Similarly to Taft, Tuck and Yang (2014) frame youth activism as long-term political labour rather than spontaneous or random. They argue that what might appear as spontaneous mobilization in the media is the result of sustained efforts involving organizing, relationship-building, and strategic communication. This understanding of the labour involved in youth activism aligns with McCarthy and Zald's (1977) emphasis on resource accumulation, while extending it to include the invisible labour necessary to maintain activist networks. One of these important but often invisible form of labour is reproductive labour. In her book *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproductive, and Feminist Struggle*, Silvia Federici (2012) argues that activism relies on cooking, cleaning, and emotional support— forms of reproductive labour that are typically unpaid, invisible, and performed by women and marginalized activists. The material conditions of activism therefore include more than just time and money, but also the necessity to

sustain oneself through the requirements and needs of everyday life that are devalued and exploited by capitalist society.

In his article “Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer”, Doug McAdams (1986) discusses these material conditions of everyday life through the concept of “biographical availability.” Specifically, McAdams uses biographic availability to highlight how life circumstances such as health, employment, and caregiving responsibilities shape an individuals’ ability to participate in activism. Individuals are therefore considered biographically available if they have fewer obligations or commitments in their day-to-day lives that would make participating in activism more difficult. In other words, the resources available to activism, such as money and time, are dependent on what remains after individual subsistence has been covered. This is echoed by the work of Deborah B. Gould (2009). In her book *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s fight against AIDS*, Gould shows that sustained activism depends not only on material resources like money, but also on activists’ available time and emotional capacity. Her work will be discussed further in the following section.

Taken together, this body of literature expands McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) resource mobilization theory by emphasizing that the material conditions needed for activism are not only financial and organizational, but also emotional and relational, which the rest of this section will explore more specifically.

1.3.2 Emotions

Regardless of how the research approaches the question of what sustains activism, many scholars consider the important role that emotions play. Drawing on 30 interviews with local activists discussing their anti-austerity activism in the UK, Emma Craddock (2019) argues that both feelings of empathy and care are essential to sustaining activist efforts, particularly during times of disillusionment. Craddock further explains that emotions

such as empathy are translated into action through enacting activism every day through forms of care (pp. 83-84). She suggests that those participating in anti-austerity activism acknowledge the everyday discourses involved in oppression and the need to combat them daily as doing something is better than doing nothing (p. 84).

A similar emphasis on the role of emotions in activism appears in Gould's (2009) analysis of the emotional dimensions of activism and politics in the grassroots political activist group ACT UP, which fought against the AIDS crisis in the USA in the 1980s. Using interviews with activists and reflecting on her own participation in ACT UP, Gould explores how emotions inform activist work. Although this type of work can often illicit feelings of sadness, Gould attests that she primarily remembers feeling angry about the AIDS crisis, which translated into a sense of urgency and a need for action (p. 9). Gould not only considers sadness and anger, but also the complex relationship between the queer communities' pride of difference and the simultaneous shame felt for going against heteronormative society. Further, Gould explores how the emotional habitus (p. 32) of the queer community over time informed the rise of ACT UP, as well as its maintenance and eventual decline in the mid-1990s.

American activists and scholars Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba (2023) also emphasize the role of emotions in sustaining and driving activism in their aforementioned book. Drawing on interviews with organizers and their own experience, Hayes and Kaba provide a guide for sustaining activist efforts in times of distress such as during times of crisis. Focusing on 'hope' as a driving force, they describe the organizers discussed throughout their book as, "stubbornly practicing hope" (p. xv) and translating that hope into meaningful action. Throughout their book, hope is emphasized as an essential emotion in initiating social change, because it provides the visionary groundwork to imagine a better

future (p. 153). This is exemplified by V. Paul Poteat, Ian Rivers, and Olivier Vecho (2020) in their study of increased hope through gender-sexuality alliance (GSA) participation among high school students, which found that the social and emotional support, resources, and advocacy work associated with GSAs increased levels of hope from the beginning to the end of the school year.

Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2023) also discuss the role of hope in sustaining activism in their book *Rehearsals for Living*. This book is an exchange of letters between Maynard and Simpson, seeking kinship between 2020 and 2021, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and heightened visibility of police brutality. In one of her letters to Simpson, Maynard's discussion of hope echoes that of Hayes and Kaba (2023), emphasizing the need for hope to avoid despair; she writes, "I held on to hope as a discipline, a practice I've learned, along with countless others, from Mariame Kaba, and moved forward out of a sense of principle commitment, rather than giving in to despair" (pp. 105-106). Kaba's (2018) famous phrasing of "hope as a discipline" is intended to reframe hope as deliberate practice and not just a feeling—hope is something you commit to, regardless of mood or circumstance. Hope as a discipline means committing to sustained activist efforts and fighting for progressive change even when the outcomes are unknown or not guaranteed.

While these authors foreground hope as a sustaining emotion practice, Brad Forenza and Andrew J. Germak (2015) consider the structural processes that enable activists to remain engaged. In their article "What Ignites and Sustains Activism: Exploring Participatory Competence", Forenza and Germak interviewed social welfare and civil rights activists from a northeastern American state about their processes and competencies. Drawing on the participatory competence framework— a sociopolitical developmental

trajectory which consists of four stages: entry, advancement, incorporation, and commitment—the authors demonstrate how moving through these stages enable social workers to find empowerment through activism (p. 232). This research emphasizes that empowerment is not merely an outcome of activism, but a sustaining force for activism, creating a cyclical effect in which action creates empowerment, and empowerment then sustains the action. Forenza and Germak further emphasize how activism is not only sustained through organizational structures and external resources, but also by the emotional experiences that activism elicits.

Nermin Allam's (2018) article, "Activism Amid Disappointment: Women's Groups and Politics of Hope in Egypt", uses semi-structured interviews with protestors and activists to explore the impacts of hope and disappointment on women's activism after the 2011 uprising that was part of the Arab Spring. Allam found that studying the politics of hope and disappointment is important for understanding gender politics and women's experiences in a post-regime change Egypt (p. 97). Allam emphasizes that activism is not only the result of affirmative feelings, but also the less expected feelings like disappointment and guilt. Maynard and Simpson (2022) echo this in their letters to one another, as Maynard specifically writes of the non-affirmative feelings of anger and rage as driving forces for mobilization as they "... compete[s] for space with the oxygen and threaten[s] to overtake me if I don't purposefully direct it outside myself" (p. 61).

In her book chapter "On Anger and Its Uses for Activism" (2018), Alexa DeGagne contends that anger is often dismissed as unproductive and irrational in political settings when it is actually a politically productive emotion that emerges from lived experiences of harm (p. 142). As such, anger can be used as a tool to name injustice and motivate action against said injustice. Rather than framing anger as something that must be controlled or

replaced with more acceptable emotions such as hope, DeGagne emphasizes anger's capacity to sustain engagement and mobilize action. DeGagne also highlights the uneven legitimization of anger, arguing that racialized, gendered, and marginalized activists are often dismissed for expressing anger. DeGagne's work thus contributes to scholarship pertaining to emotions and activism by reframing anger as a politically generative emotion that can both sustain and motivate activist action.

Building on DeGagne's argument that uneven legitimizations of anger are often dismissed, crip and queer scholars such as Robert McRuer (2026) argue that disabled queer people's anger is often pathologized or dismissed. In his article "Crip Apocalyptic Times, Cripqueer Rage", McRuer argues that cripqueer rage emerges in response to "apocalyptic" conditions, such as the devaluation of disabled life during the COVID-19 pandemic by many who refused to wear masks or social distance. Ruer thus frames cripqueer rage as a politically charged response to intersecting ableist and heteronormative systems of power. Cripqueer rage highlights how disabled and queer activists are expected to be grateful rather than angry, reframing their anger as a form of resistance. This perspective illustrates how anger can be used as a mobilizing force for activists.

In their article "Fear, Hope, Anger, and Guilt in Climate Activism", Jochen Kleres & Åsa Wettergren (2017) explore both perceived positive and negative emotions and their interplay by considering how fear, hope, anger, and guilt can cyclically sustain activism. Qualitative interviews were conducted with climate activists in Denmark, Sweden, and at two United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conferences of Youth. Using a mix of open-ended and guided questions to facilitate conversation specifically about these emotions, the authors found that feelings of guilt can transform demobilizing fear into mobilizing anger (p. 508) while hope can mitigate the negative effects of fear (p. 517).

Hayes and Kaba (2023) make a similar argument throughout their book as they emphasize their intention to “... radicalize you rather than lead you to despair” (p. xv). They state that our belief in human potential and our imagination must outweigh the fear of human failure; Activists must be courageous and visionary so as to not become fearful and actionless (p. 34). As such, Hayes and Kaba argue that activists must hold on to both our grief and hope and allow them to coexist (p. 153).

The article “The Role of Youth Activism in Facilitating Social Change: A Catalyst for Transformation in the Contemporary Era” by Ali Shah and Zainullah Khan (2023) also emphasizes the role of emotions in activism. Utilizing a comprehensive literature review to explore the role that youth play in facilitating social change, Shah and Khan discover how feelings of immediacy push youth activists to participate in social change. This is also evident in the aforementioned quote from Maynard and Simpson (2023), in which Maynard emphasizes her need to purposefully direct her anger outside herself (p. 61). In their discussion of environmental concerns, Shah and Khan explain that activism is often driven by a feeling of immediacy to actively mitigate pressing concerns (p. 5).

1.3.3 Relationships and Community

Another important element of sustaining activism is the role of relationships and community. Nick Montgomery and carla bergman (2017) discuss this in their book, *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*, which is an exploration of the rigid understandings of how to be radical and how these understandings can be undone. The authors explore how trust, care, curiosity, commitment and responsibility in radical movements are intertwined emphasizing that “strong relationships are the foundation of resistance” (p. 126). This is also exemplified through the book *Activism That Works* (Whitmore, Wilson, & Calhoun, 2011), an edited collection that explores eight social justice

movements understanding of their own success. In Bill Hynd and Carol Miller's chapter on the success of Oxfam, a group of over 20 non-government organizations working globally to fight poverty and inequality, the authors discuss how relationships are not only important to the effectiveness of advocacy, but also its overall sustainment (p. 37). Similarly, Sharon Montgomery's chapter discussing the success of the Calgary Raging Grannies also points to the role of relationships and community in sustaining activism:

what sustains us is the fun but also the awareness that we're part of a huge movement. We are not alone. 'We feel we are making a difference'. We feel empowered as individuals, because we are part of a small group that has found a fun way to state our opinion (p. 74).

Rather than considering how community and relationships sustain activist efforts through its creation of fun, John Della Volpe (2021) argues that the sustainment of youth activism comes from a place of collective trauma. He explores how those born between the late 1990s and early 2000s have faced a particularly large onslaught of instability and turmoil, including, but not limited to, the 2008 financial crisis, global warming, 9/11, the COVID pandemic, and increases in mass shootings across the United States. As such, Della Volpe argues that Gen Z-ers find community in the failure of their leaders and the trauma of their generation (p. 77) which pushes them to use their strong voices and recognize their ability to create change. This is exemplified by the 2018 mid-term elections in the United States, when young adults ages 18-29 turned up in record numbers, voting out a record number of politicians backed by Trump and The National Rifle Association (p. 76).

Hayes and Kaba (2023) also consider the role of community in driving activism, including an acknowledgement of how their relationship to each other has impacted their work. Even though Hayes did not believe its goal was possible, she joined the Reparation

Now campaign, a legislative campaign to provide financial reparation to enslaved African descendants in the United States. They explain it as follows:

It's simple: Mariame [Kaba] and Kelly [Hayes] had an established relationship and had built trust over the years. While Kelly's skepticism about the political system kept her from initially believing in the possibility that we might win, her belief in Mariame and other organizers convinced her the fight would be meaningful, generative, and work waging, even if the measure did not pass (p. 19).

Although this example may emphasize how relationships get people involved in activism, they go on to explain how relationships also sustain activist work because community builds hope (p. 155). Hope is therefore a key element of sustaining activism and is created through relationships. Hayes and Kaba argue that individual activists are only as strong as the communities that support them, and the moment they lose that community support, they risk being swallowed by fear and overwhelm (pp. 143, 180). Hayes and Kaba also emphasize the role of the relationships between the activist and their audience. They argue that activists must help other people imagine the world they are fighting for (p. 40). They also point to the need to meet people where they are at by engaging with people who may not support their cause or hold different worldviews so as to not become gatekeepers (p. 182).

This is echoed in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, where adrienne maree brown (2019) draws on black feminist thought, disability justice, and queer theory to challenge the assumption that political activism is just hard work that requires self-sacrifice, and instead rethinks activism and politics as something that can feel good. brown explains that, through a process of rethinking and remaking social justice as an enjoyable experience, activists have the power to support each other on the journey (p. 275). For brown, pleasure activism is about reclaiming the right to feel good within struggle and to build movements that require joy, connection, mutual support, and well-being— fulfilling, rather than

depleting participants. Activism based in feeling good offers the support needed to deepen commitment, resist oppressive systems, and ultimately sustain engagement over time.

In their discussion of how to be militant about joy, Montgomery and bergman (2017) discuss building relationships as a method of undoing rigid radicalism. They emphasize that this would help movements “*build, maintain and repair* trust” (p. 160) by taking responsibility for complicity with empire (p. 161). They state that “to be *militant* about *joy* means forging common notions that can enable, sustain, and deepen transformation here and now, starting from wherever people find themselves” (p. 213). As rigid radicalism creates division, the authors argue that meeting people where they are could help sustain progressive movements rather than creating further division.

1.4 Summary

Overall, this literature review demonstrates that while there is substantial scholarship on youth activism, Alberta’s political history, and the emotional and material conditions that sustain social movements, there is a lack of overlap between these discussions. In other words, there is little discussion of what sustains youth activism in Alberta. Of the aforementioned articles, Shah & Khan (2023) and Della Volpe (2021) discuss youth specifically but not with the intention of understanding what sustains them. Likewise, Kleres and Wettergren (2017) research includes youth participants but does not discuss the specifics of how youth activism may be enacted or sustained differently. Within Alberta-specific scholarship, Novakowski’s chapter in *Bucking Conservatism* is written as reflective piece on his experience as a youth activist in the 1960s. Although it provides important historical insights into youth activism, it does not address the conditions facing youth activists today. This shows a clear gap in the literature that my research has the potential to contribute to. Broadly speaking, Alberta scholarship tends to focus on adult-led movements through a

historical lens or school-based activism. This leaves a significant gap in understanding progressive youth activism in the current political climate of Alberta. This literature review has allowed me to deepen my knowledge on my research topic and develop a more robust and informed research practice. I now turn to a discussion of my theoretical framework and methodologies.

CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework & Methodology

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework and the methodology I have employed that shaped this research project. This first part of this chapter will discuss my theoretical framework. Here, I draw upon the work of Sara Ahmed (2015), Elizabeth V. Spelman (1997), and Audre Lorde (1997) who consider the work that emotions do in upholding and dismantling dominant systems of power. The second section of the chapter discusses my methodology, including an acknowledgment of my positionality, an overview of the ethics and recruitment process, the consent and interview process, and an explanation of how I utilized both feminist critical discourse analysis and the discourse historical approach to discursively analyze my interviews.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Theories of Emotion

My research draws on the work of Sara Ahmed (2015), Elizabeth V. Spelman (1997) and Audre Lorde (1997) who acknowledge the socially constructed nature of emotions and consider the limitations of only conceptualizing emotions as predictable innate responses to a situation(s). Both Ahmed's (2015) book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* and Spelman's (1997) book *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing our Attention to Suffering* conceptualize emotions as social, relational, and political forces that circulate between bodies, shaping how we come to understand the world and our place within it. That is, emotions are not simply felt individually but are active forces that do things— influencing how bodies socially come together and move apart. This framework rejects the binary classification of emotions as either positive or negative, one that obscures the ways emotions can overlap and inform each other. These scholars have helped me think about the role that emotions play in

mobilizing activist efforts and sustaining such efforts. I will discuss this further in Chapter Three as I explore themes such as sadness as indicative of a moral claim, the translation of anger into action, and hope into perseverance.

In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2015), Sara Ahmed theorizes emotions as, “social and cultural practices” (p. 9). Rather than considering emotions as created from within, Ahmed’s concept of “affective economies” posits that emotions are not private, individual, psychological states, but social forces that circulate between bodies, signs, and institutions informing social practices, norms, and expectations and shaping the way we are expected to feel. Through their circulation, emotions become attached, or ‘stick’ to certain bodies, identities, and social groups, reinforcing dominant discourses and shaping who is perceived as deserving of protection and care. These affective attachments also shape who can claim the category of ‘youth’, as emotions such as anger circulate unevenly across racialized and gendered bodies. In this way, “affective economies” demonstrate how emotions can function as mechanisms of power for activists, aligning individuals with collective identities and reinforcing dominate social norms.

As such, Ahmed suggests that emotions are a part of social and political life; they are an integral part of the construction of power relations and social norms. Emotions also show how boundaries between bodies are formed and crossed, forming attachments and separations. Being aware of how affective economies shape the way we are expected to feel can allow activists to contest the dominant discourses which create and uphold the forms of oppression they seek to change. Ahmed also frames emotions as responses based in a moral claim, that is, as an orientation towards the sufferer that positions them as a moral agent rather than the object of pity. This theorization reframes emotions as not simply a reaction, but as recognition of a wrongdoing

and offering direction for political change. Feeling sadness or anger for another's suffering therefore signals a moral recognition of injustice.

In her book *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering* (1997), Elizabeth V. Spelman explains that our emotions are not simply signs of a mental or physical response but, rather “indicate how we see the world” (p. 102). Using anger as an example, Spelman explains “what identifies my emotion as anger is, among other things, a belief that some unjust harm has been done” (p. 102). As such, Spelman presents an understanding of emotions as indicators of our moral belief systems, socially constructed by our surroundings rather than inherent responses to events and circumstances. In this sense, emotions do things: they signal how we perceive others' suffering and how we orient ourselves towards this suffering. Spelman focuses her work on the ways political and economic systems frame suffering as a personal failing or an inevitability. This framing reinforces those systems by shifting responsibility for suffering onto individuals, rather than recognizing how the systems themselves produce and sustain suffering.

Building on Ahmed and Spelman, I also draw on Audre Lorde's (1997) theorization of anger as an emotional force capable of political transformation. In “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism”, Lorde frames anger as a necessary response to injustice, distinguishing it from hate by arguing that the object of hate is destruction and death, while the object of anger is change. In this sense, anger functions as an energizing and generative force capable of mobilizing collective transformation when acknowledged and directed with purpose.

For Lorde, anger arises from lived experiences of oppression, signaling the presence of injustice. Rather than fearing or suppressing anger, Lorde highlights the importance of using anger as a source of political clarity, arguing that when focused with precision, anger can become “a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (p. 280). The suppression of anger,

Lorde contends, functions to maintain and support existing systems of power by preventing those impacted by injustice from fully responding to oppressive conditions. As such, anger is a critical emotional resource that can contribute to sustained engagement in social justice. Fearing anger's power can neutralize its transformative potential, allowing oppressive systems of power to persist.

Utilizing the work of Sara Ahmed (2015), Elizabeth V. Spelman (1997) and Audre Lorde (1997), I employ a theoretical framework that acknowledges emotions as socially and politically constructed forces that can both reinforce and challenge systems of power and oppression. These theories allow my research to consider how emotions are involved in the sustaining activist efforts. This framework recognizes how emotions can signal injustice and make visible our moral commitments, reframing suffering as a collective rather than individual failing. My theoretical framework thus conceptualizes emotions as socially and politically constructed forces that move, circulate, and inform. They shape how activists come together with their cause, how they respond to injustice, and how they sustain their efforts. Through this lens, I will analyze how emotions mobilize and sustain activist efforts—how sadness presents a moral claim, how anger becomes action, and how hope, empathy, and love sustain perseverance.

2.2 Methodology

After addressing my positionality and how it impacted my research, this section will discuss my chosen methodology. Addressing my positionality first helps ground my methodological decisions, demonstrating how my position as a researcher has informed the approach I have chosen. As my research focuses on how emotions and resources are involved in sustaining activism, I sought to employ methodology that amplifies the voices of my activist participants. This section will therefore explore the process of conducting

semi-structured qualitative interviews with 10 activists. This includes applying for ethics approval, recruiting participants, receiving consent, and the interview process itself. Finally, this section will discuss how the interviews were analyzed and coded using feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) and the discourse historical approach (DHA) which provided a guide to consider the discursive strategies being used.

2.2.1 Positionality

I acknowledge that my positionality has informed this research project. I intend to employ an interpretivist axiology, that is, I recognize that my research is inherently subjective, and inseparable from my own experiences and beliefs. I am a 30-year-old, white, cisgender woman of European settler descent. I am able-bodied, straight, and a citizen of both Canada and the United States. I have a post-secondary education and am economically upper-middle class. While I am ideologically aligned with the participants' support of progressive social change as a progressive Albertan, I hold forms of privilege that shape my lived reality differently from many of the participants in this study. Rapport was built between myself and the interview participants in a variety of ways, the most obvious being shared political views. For those in Lethbridge, being in the same town also built rapport. I also had some more specific connections to some interview participants. My donations to Sage Clan, a grassroots volunteer community patrol in Lethbridge that supports the unhoused community and those suffering from addiction, added to my rapport with B while my connection to the University of Lethbridge helped to build rapport with Katie. I recognize that while building rapport contributed to creating a sense of comfort and safety during our interviews, my relative privilege may have limited my ability to fully understand certain experiences of oppression or marginalization. While I may not be able to fully

understand, I conducted my research from a place of care and empathy and a recognition that interviews are inherently a co-construction of knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee.

As a researcher, I am in a position of power that shaped how participants' experiences are interpreted, represented, and legitimized within academic discourse. While participants are the experts on their lived experiences, I determined how their words were analyzed, framed, and presented. This dynamic reflects broader structures of academic power that privilege my interpretations over participants' own knowledge production. While I attempted to represent the participants' words accurately, I also recognize that there is always a risk of misinterpretation as well as the unintentional reproduction of dominant narratives of power. To mitigate these structures of academic power, recognizing the difficulty of such a task, I had interview participants review their transcripts before I commenced my discourse analysis to ensure they were comfortable with how I had transcribed their words. Further, I sent a copy of this thesis to each participant upon its completion and have invited them to my thesis defense. Stating my positionality is my way of acknowledging and recognizing that my work is not unbiased, nor can it be applied universally or objectively. I recognize my ethical responsibility in representing participants' experiences, particularly as someone who cannot fully relate due to differences in social locations. Through this study, I have prioritized listening carefully, being reflexive in my analysis, and centering participants' own words wherever possible.

Through my research, I continuously acknowledged and considered how my social position was impacting my findings. My progressive values and positionality have informed all aspects of my research including the impetus for this research, what questions I asked in

my interviews, how I asked them, how I have interpreted the data, and which scholars I have chosen to support my findings. I believe it is important to explicitly acknowledge the impact this has had on my research. Inspired by Jackson et al. (2024) and their discussion of positionality in feminist scholarship, I recognize that my positionality is fluid, relational, and embedded within broader structures of power that shape knowledge production. I also acknowledge that my positionality continues to evolve, as does our social landscape (p. 7). Engaging with my positionality is an ongoing reflexive process that requires that I continuously reflect on my assumptions, privileges, and how my social location impacted my engagement with participants and my interpretation of their experiences.

2.2.2 Qualitative Interviews

a) Ethics and Recruitment

Prior to beginning the actual process of recruitment and interviewing, I applied for human subject ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB) and received approval mid-February 2025. Although tedious, this process went smoother than I had anticipated, thanks to conducting a mock ethics application through CSPT 5103: Qualitative Interviewing prior to submitting my final ethics application. The ethics application itself was quite straightforward. As someone who likes structure, being told exactly what was needed made this process far less intimidating than I had initially expected. From submission to approval took three and a half weeks with two rounds of minor edits. My ethics approval was renewed on February 6th, 2026 so that I could send my participants my thesis in the spring upon its completion along with an invitation to attend my defense.

Participant recruitment (see Appendices 1-5) began shortly thereafter. I began by identifying university-based Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs), feminist/women's campus centres and other Alberta based activist organizations and groups through Instagram and Google searches using key words such as [social movement] + [activism] + [Alberta/town/city]. Since my research considers all forms of activism for any progressive cause, determining who to reach out to was quite simple. Essentially, as long as the organization or group was in Alberta, they were an option.

Once I had identified the organizations and groups I wanted to contact, I reached out through Instagram direct message (DM) or email with the approved letters of initial contact (Appendix C-E) and recruitment poster (Appendix B). In my initial contact, I asked people to share my recruitment poster; most organizations or groups agreed to do this, and did so in a variety of ways including emailing it to their constituents, posting it to their social media pages, and printing it for their in-person bulletin boards. When a potential participant contacted me directly, I sent them a follow-up email with an attached Letter of Invitation (Appendix D). Although more than 10 individuals had contacted me about participating, as is to be expected, some failed to reply to my follow-up emails, while others chose to opt out. Three weeks after my initial contact, I again requested willing organizations and groups to re-share the recruitment poster and I also contacted new Instagram pages and organizations to cast a wider net.

The article "The Voices Heard and the Voices Silenced: Recruitment Processes in Qualitative Interview Studies" by Guro Korsnes Kristensen and Malin Noem Ravn (2015) was influential in determining who to contact. Kristensen's and Ravn's work questions the recruitment process for qualitative interview research arguing that recruitment processes

must be attended to with care and acknowledgement of how the researcher’s positionality and situatedness can impact who is recruited. The authors contend that “convention or cultural praxis” can lead to the recruitment of the most obvious participants which “... leads, again, to a strong circular motion, wherein research in a particular field easily includes the most known voices but is less likely to include less known voices that could expand our scientific understanding of the field” (p. 730). While determining who to contact was largely determined by my research question (18 to 35 years old, participating in activism, and located in Alberta), I was also mindful of Kristensen and Ravn’s arguments during my recruitment process. I was intentional in my aim to cast a net wide enough to include areas across Alberta with individuals participating in multiple forms of activism and supporting various causes. This included, groups supporting climate justice, queer rights, immigrant rights, harm reduction, and reproductive rights, to name a few. I was also mindful to consider groups from across Alberta, contacting organizations in smaller communities such as Olds, Wetaskiwin, and Grand Prairie. Regardless of these efforts, most of my participants are from larger Alberta cities. Altogether, from the time of commencing my recruitment through to conducting my final interview took approximately 10 weeks.

Table 1 shows how each participant self-identifies, providing further context for my analysis in Chapters Three and Four.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Name/ Pseudonym	Age	Pronouns	Location	Advocating For
Emily	33	She/her	Calgary	Climate Justice, Education
Marko	32	He/him	Lethbridge	LGBTQ+ Rights
Sam	35	They/them	Edmonton	Free Palestine

Dayn	25	They/them	Calgary	LGBTQ+ Rights
Katie	34	She/her	Lethbridge	LGBTQ+ Rights
B	27	He/him	Lethbridge	Harm Reduction, Unhoused Advocacy
Francine	19	She/her	Lethbridge	Student Interest Advocacy, Black Lives Matter, Congo is Bleeding
Макс (Maki)	25	They/them	Edmonton	Climate Justice
Rebecca	23	She/her	Lethbridge	Queer Rights, Education Reform
Azi	25	She/her/ they/them	Wetaskiwin	Harm reduction, Unhoused Advocacy

Each participant was asked to provide this demographic information at the beginning of the interview. The question was framed as follows: “Can you tell me your name, pronouns, age, location, and any other biographical information you want me to know and that you think is relevant to this research?” While all participants answered the prompts for specific biographical information (name, pronouns, age, and location), few offered additional information. Francine and Rebecca stated what they were studying in university and at what level, while Макс and Katie jumped right into discussing the forms of activism they are involved with. Both Katie and Sam also included a brief explanation of their paid work. Sam was the only participant to give biographical information pertaining to race and gender, stating that they are a white settler and queer. As many of the participants discussed their activist efforts in terms of fighting larger systems of power such as patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, capitalism, etc., the *advocating for* category of Table 1 is not an extensive list of the movements or causes that the participants are involved with, but rather those that were most discussed when considering how their activist work is sustained.

b) Consent and Interview Process

When creating the consent form, I considered Pascoe Leahy's (2022) article, "The Afterlife of Interviews: Explicit Ethics and Subtle Ethics in Sensitive or Distressing Qualitative Research". Many activists do advocacy work for groups that they are a part of. This means that often they have personally faced the different forms of oppression that they are fighting against. Therefore, there was a possibility that our conversations could trigger some emotional or traumatic memories for my participants. Pascoe Leahy states that "...protecting the interests of human beings should always triumph over the abstract pursuit of knowledge" (p. 780). As such, I wanted to be sure to protect my participants as best I could and support them through any difficult emotions that might arise. This is why I included a section on my interview consent form that provided additional resources for the participants should they need them. This included phone numbers for the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Alberta Mental Health Helpline. In addition, I also followed up with each participant by email one-week post-interview to ensure that I had their ongoing consent to include their voice in my research and that they were feeling okay post-interview. Thankfully, no participant withdrew from the study.

All participants were required to sign a consent form before starting the interview (Appendix A). As I was unable to travel around the province, all of my interviews were conducted over Zoom. Lethbridge participants were offered the option of Zoom or in-person interviews, and all opted for Zoom. Verbal consent was collected as part of the interview recording, and I signed the consent form as the "person obtaining consent". At this time, participants were also given the option of providing a pseudonym if they did not want their real name to be used for any reason. Four participants opted to use a pseudonym. Participants were given a copy of the consent form for their records. All interviews were

recorded using my personal cellphone. At the conclusion of the interview, the data was downloaded to my personal password protected laptop in a password protected folder and deleted from my cellphone to ensure privacy, as required by the REB.

Guidance from Dr. Athena Elafros and Rosanne E. Roberts (2020) were foundational in helping me create my Interview guide (see Appendix F). Dr. Elafros helped me flesh out my questions and reminded me to be flexible and give the participants the freedom to discuss what they want to discuss, while also bringing them back to the question if necessary. The following excerpt from Roberts was also an important reminder that I considered while writing my interview questions: “novice researchers that approach their research as if they already know the answer to the research question are in danger of guiding the interview in a way that leads informants to provide responses that support their predetermined expectations” (p. 3189). Although the concept of writing an interview guide seems straightforward, coming up with questions that were not leading proved more difficult than I had expected. Additionally, Sarah J. Tracy’s (2020) work helped me form a semi-structured interview guide that contained more open-ended questions which prevented me from pigeonholing my participants into what they *should* talk about rather than what they *wanted* to talk about. Her explanation and examples of interview types helped me to form more generative questions, which she describes as, “an umbrella category for non-directive, non-threatening queries that serve to *generate* (rather than dictate) frameworks for talk” (p. 166). More specifically, I used four questions, asking the interview participant for broad overviews of events, experiences, etc., (p. 166) which allowed the participants to give a full, unguided explanation of what sustained their activism.

While conducting my interviews, I kept a journal to note how I was feeling before, during, and after each one. This is the first time that I have conducted multiple interviews that

were around an hour long. Naturally, new experiences make me nervous, but my nerves started to fade with each interview I completed. By my final interview, my ‘before’ section just said “Ready!” The ‘during’ section of my journals was largely used to jot down comments that I wanted to come back to or ask for more detail on. This section got messier with each interview as my point form notes turned to chicken scratch. In the future, I think I would like to be more mindful of this and take my time with these notes so that I could return to them more easily post-interview. Finally, my ‘after’ section was used to debrief with myself after each interview. By my third interview I noted that I was starting to see some themes emerge such as the importance of community and the role of anger and love in sustaining activism. This section was also used to make notes of things I might want to do different for future interviews. For example, after my fifth interview I noted that I needed to slow down and probe for more in-depth responses. This ‘after’ reflection was not a process I did consistently. At first, I would do this immediately after the interviews. By interview six, I was reflecting on the interview the following day, and for my final two interviews I did not do any final reflection. In the future, I want to be more intentional with my journaling as I do think it is an important process and looking back, the notes I did take were useful to reflect on before the next interview and when transcribing and discursively analysing my interviews later.

Before coding and discursively analysing my interviews, I first had to transcribe them. I really enjoyed this process. Doing things that are repetitive, detail-oriented, and heavily structured is comfortable to me. Waking up and knowing that my goal for the morning was to drink my coffee and transcribe was a calming feeling. Of course, by the sixth or seventh interview it was starting to become exhausting, but it was still enjoyable to listen back and see how much work I had done and be open minded about what themes might emerge. As Cindy M.

Bird (2005) explains, transcriptions are “always and necessarily selective” (p. 228). She goes on to explain that, “this act of choice implies decisions about significance, which in turn imply interpretation from some point of view” (p. 228). With this in mind, I tried to include as many details as possible. I transcribed verbatim but chose to exclude my interjections of “mhm” and “right”. I chose to italicize words that were emphasised by the participants and was mindful to transcribe in a way that would not lose meaning but still provide a readable flow for the quotes I have included in this thesis. This process emphasized exactly what Bird argues, namely that a lot of the details are missed through transcribing. As such, I was sure to use timestamps so that I could listen to my recordings again. This allowed me to ensure that I captured the cadence of my interviewers’ words as accurately as possible.

As stated above, participants were contacted one-week post-interview to ensure that I had their ongoing consent and that they were feeling okay about the interview. I also provided them with the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. As transcriptions cannot fully capture cadence, I wanted to ensure that my participants were comfortable with how I transcribed their words and offer them the opportunity to provide clarification. Responses to this initiative were varied, with some participants taking the time to read the transcripts and provide feedback, making small edits on the spelling of certain words or asking me to omit specific names of organizations. Others opted to forgo reviewing the transcript all together. Regardless of their response, I still felt it important to give my participants this opportunity for clarification.

2.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was employed as a mode to analyze the transcripts. Specifically, I used feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) to consider how power informs how youth

activism is sustained. Lazar (2007) proposes that FCDA is intended to show the complex ways in which “hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (p. 142). More specifically, FCDA considers how systemic relations of power— such as heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and class— shape social practices, including the activism of the youth activists I interviewed. This fusing of feminism and CDA can “produce a rich and powerful political critique for action” (p. 144). FCDA provided a method of analysis that aligns with my theoretical framework as both consider how systems of power impact social practices, which, in turn, socially construct our understanding of and utilization of emotion.

Rather than considering the interviews as purely reflections of experience, FCDA allowed me to attend to how power operates through language in unequal ways. Specifically, FCDA allowed me to consider how emotions are discursively constructed and socially situated and examine how emotions are produced, circulate, and made meaningful through language. Further, as I will explore in Chapter Four, FCDA also allowed me to consider how resources that must be negotiate alongside subsistence operate as discursive sites where activist norms— such as self-sacrifice and productivity— are both reproduced and resisted.

In conjunction with an FCDA framework, Reisigl and Wodak’s (2015) discourse historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse analysis was used to analyze my interviews. DHA considers five discursive strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification or mitigation (p. 33). The following questions describe what each of these strategies is considering:

1. How are persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?

2. What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?
 3. What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?
 4. From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, and arguments expressed?
 5. Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, intensified or mitigated?
- (p.32)

The transcripts were analyzed with the DHA discursive strategies in mind to emphasize possible themes between interviews. This included some of the following examples:

- Do the participants refer to themselves as activists? Do they discuss themselves singularly or in terms of a collective movement(s)?
- Do the participants associate positive or negative language to themselves, their countermovements, their work, their peers, etc.?
- Do the participants make any arguments or grand claims?
- What perspective are my participants using?
- Do the participants downplay their activist work or intensify it?

As these guiding questions suggest, I was looking for themes that indicate whether the activists consider their work to be individual or collective. This helped me identify whether relationships help sustain activism. Emotions such as hope and anger were also considered to enquire into their impact on the sustainment of activist work. I was also mindful of remaining open to additional themes that may arise organically so that my research was not guided to pre-conceived outcome. This means that DHA discursive strategies were only used as a guide and not a strict outline.

I used NVivo to code the transcripts. At first, I did try doing all my coding by hand; highlighting important words, cutting out and paper clipping excerpts together that discussed similar themes. Eventually, this became tedious and a bit unorganized as some excerpts held multiple themes which made grouping them challenging. This is when I decided to make the switch to using NVivo. I did not rely on any of its built-in coding systems but instead, used it as a tool for sorting and storing my data manually. Based on my research question and interview guide, I focused my coding on three main themes: emotions, resources, and barriers. These were then subcategorized into specific emotions, barriers, and resources (i.e. hope, anger, and sadness were subcategories for my emotions category). Subcategories were not pre-determined but came to be based on the interview participants' responses. Using NVivo allowed me to keep track of how many participants discussed each subcategory, and the frequency at which each subcategory was discussed. For example, anger was discussed in nine of my ten interviews, and it was mentioned 29 times overall. This, in turn, guided the structure of my analysis chapters, which will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Through NVivo I also coded for mentions or definitions of the terms activist and activism which informed my discussion of both terms in my introductory chapter.

2.4 Summary

By considering the theories of emotion presented by Sara Ahmed, Elizabeth V. Spelman, and Audre Lorde, I acknowledge that the ways in which we understand emotions are socially constructed. Semi-structured interviews provided a qualitative method of inquiry that allows my participants to express what they believe to be relevant to the sustainment of their activist work, limiting the possibility of leading my research to pre-conceived conclusions. My decision to analyze my interviews using both the discourse historical approach and feminist critical

discourse analysis allowed me to consider how language is shaped by social and cultural factors and how language creates meanings and influences social outcomes. I now turn to the first analysis chapter in which I explore the work that emotions do in sustaining activism.

CHAPTER THREE: “If We’re Not Having Joy Or Pleasure, Then What Are We Doing?”: The Role Of Emotions In Sustaining Activism

This chapter considers the work that emotions do in sustaining activism. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Ahmed (2015), Spelman (1997), and Lorde (1997) contend that emotions *do* things, that is, they are not just something felt individually in our bodies but they also construct the social world around us. While emotions are often grouped as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, this chapter reveals that such a conceptualization creates a binary that does not consider the interconnectedness of emotions. As this chapter discusses, the activists I interviewed identified a variety of emotions— sadness, anger, hope, empathy, and love— that underpin their activism. These emotions overlap, intertwine, and inform each other.

In the following quote, Katie, a 34-year-old queer rights activist, discusses the complexity of emotions and how she utilizes emotion in her activist work:

It’s important to sit in those [negative] feelings but we also can’t get lost in them. We need to try to find motivation from them and take from them something to push us forward, whether it’s spite or rage, or empathy or caring or a desire to salvage and save what we can or hope for the future. Whatever that is, take from that negative dark feeling an inspiration and a drive to move forward so that you prevent the next generation from feeling that or you lessen that feeling for yourself because you know that you were able to save something or someone along the way.

As discussed in my introductory chapter, Katie’s articulation of the experience of getting lost in the “negative dark feeling” is an impetus for this research. Myself and so many of my friends, who are also white and upper-middle class, have struggled to move past the feelings of sadness and defeat, limiting our ability to effect positive change. I recognize that this experience of emotional paralysis is shaped by our social location and relative privilege and that our relationship to urgency differs from those who are directly impacted by the causes they support. Katie’s insights exemplify that the work emotions do to sustain activist efforts is much more

complicated than a simple positive/negative binary as, rather than allowing the negative feelings to paralyze her, they provide the drive and inspiration to “move forward”.

Similarly, Sam, a 35-year-old therapist from Edmonton, further exemplifies the nuance of emotions and how it is essential that they combine the emotions they feel in order to sustaining their work:

I think that anger has to have joy also. I don't think those are opposite things, I think those are complimentary forces. I don't think you have to stop being angry to be joyful or vice versa and I don't know [pause] if we're not having joy or pleasure then what are we doing?

Here, emotions are presented as “complimentary forces” sustaining each other as they sustain Sam's efforts to effect progressive change in their day-to-day life. Although activist work can be heavy and hard at times, Sam contends that there still needs to be an element of joy, or pleasure, to sustain those efforts. adrienne marie brown's (2019) framework of pleasure activism, discussed in the previous chapter, is helpful to this analysis. brown contends that social justice work should be centered around joy and pleasure as tools for liberation, suggesting that activist work should be enjoyable and, by proxy, sustainable. Sam echoes this sentiment when they ask, “if we're not having joy or pleasure then what are we doing?” In Sam's case, joy sustains their activism alongside anger as both emotions are “complimentary forces.” While anger may light the fire to fight injustice, joy helps sustain this fight over the long term as it makes activism a pleasurable experience.

This chapter will explore how emotions function as sustaining forces in activist work. Rather than treating emotions as personal and individual feelings, this chapter understands them as doing things: bringing bodies together as a collective, shaping moral intentions, and creating collectives. Further, it will consider the temporality of emotions, revealing how emotions do not simply coexist, but unfold across time, shaping the trajectories of activist work. This chapter will

explore how sadness and pain signal injustice and affirm activists' commitments and boundaries, while present-oriented anger transforms this recognition of injustice into action with support from the future-oriented emotion of hope. This chapter will also consider the role of empathy in sustaining activism while cautioning against the risk of empathy becoming actionless pity. Finally, the power of love will be discussed in terms of its ability to bind activists to their cause and vision of a just future through a commitment to their loved ones experiencing the forms of oppression they advocate against.

3.1 Sadness and Pain

Through my interviews, sadness came up repeatedly as an emotion that sustains activism, but in different ways. While anger seems to be the fuel to the activist fire, which I will explore in the next section, Sam explains that sadness is an emotion that provides one with information; it gives a sense of moral clarity and direction, indicative of an injustice. In this sense, sadness functions as a retrospective emotion, marking the past as morally significant and shaping how activists understand the present. Leaning into sadness can thus alter one's response to the situation. Sam explains as follows:

I mean, managing sadness is a big part of [sustaining activism]. Managing despair, which is sadness put on a back burner on a low boil I would say. And managing hopelessness. Those are not [pause] in terms of productive or helpful emotions, they don't do a lot for an activist cause, feeling those ways. Or for being alive they don't— they're not life-giving, they aren't inspiring things to feel. But I try to connect with them as like "Oh but that means I'm a human. That means my values are intact. If that makes me feel this way, if that's devastating to me then my soul is still good", that kind of feeling. So, yeah, I guess they're sustainful in their own way, and usually they just need some time and space.

Katie echoes this reflective approach to sadness, explaining the importance of acknowledging these feelings rather than suppressing them:

If we're feeling angry or sad or hopeless we can't just shut that out. We need to sit with it for a minute and feel it and give ourselves space to feel it and then ask "Why? Why am I

feeling this way?” and sometimes it might be that the why is out of your control and you just need to find a way through it or distract from it. Or sometimes the why might be an internalized message that’s not even your own like “I’m not good enough” or “I’m not trying hard enough.” And some things you might be able to control. But I think we can’t shy away from those feelings because when we shut them out they just get bigger.

Both Sam and Katie reveal that sadness as retrospective emotion can sustain activism. By creating space to feel sad rather than suppressing the emotion, Katie’s and Sam’s awareness of their emotional response reaffirms their moral connection to their causes. The temporal orientation of sadness requires that both Sam and Katie look back at prior experiences to understand the source of their feeling. Sadness thus becomes a reflective force which helps them identify what is within and beyond their control and create boundaries that will in turn sustain their activism.

For Sam, managing sadness is also important to sustaining the longevity of their activist efforts as sadness reminds them of their values and allows them to recognize when they need to take a step back in order to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Sam explains that emotions such as sadness and despair are “not life-giving. They aren’t inspiring things to feel.” At the same time, Sam recognizes their important role in sustaining Sam’s activist work as they provide information that helps Sam set boundaries:

Sometimes [feelings of sadness are] markers of a boundary or limit of “You can’t keep consuming this information today because you’re no longer using it to empower you to do something you’re using it to stop doing something which isn’t helpful to you or anyone else.”

Sadness, and often other related emotions such as hopelessness, create boundaries which are needed to avoid feeling overwhelmed or defeated. For Sam, feelings of sadness remind them to take a step back as they are no longer using the information they are consuming to “empower” them to do something. The recognition of the privilege of being able to set boundaries to avoid burnout will be considered more specifically in Chapter Four.

Sam's experience is not the only way sadness operates for activist sustainment. For Маки, sadness also takes the form of grief:

And I also associate [overwhelm] with sadness. Right below the anger, you know, there's that grief and that's the grief of feeling like I have my future robbed from me and that my children do and their children do. That the generations in our future are not going to be honoured today.

Маки's sadness extends beyond personal feeling, acknowledging collective and intergenerational loss. It signals a mourning for futures stolen through ongoing social and environmental injustices. Although Маки's grief is oriented towards a lost future, grief itself is retrospective as it mourns what has already been lost. In this sense, even future-oriented grief is grounded in a recognition of harm already done. For Маки, sadness operates as an indicator of what has been and continues to be taken; a future they do not hope for. This unwanted vision of the future and the sadness and grief Маки associates with it propels them to action. As Маки explains, to avoid "putting [themselves] in a really bad place, [they] need to channel all of [their] energy. Some people do arts, but for [them] event organizing just called to [them]." In this sense, feelings of sadness and grief propel Маки into action; organizing activist events such as cooking for the homeless and events that raise awareness about climate change.

Returning to Sam's discussion of sadness, it is worth noting that they are not personally experiencing the oppression of the causes they are advocating for. In my analysis, Sam's involvement in financially supporting a young man in Gaza exists alongside the fact that Sam is not Palestinian and therefore cannot relate directly to the experience of Palestinians. Yet, Sam's sadness reveals a sense of connection that extends beyond personal experience. Ahmed's (2015) discussion of pain helps to make sense of this dynamic. Feelings are not only personal, but shape understandings of the world and reactions to it, showing how boundaries between bodies can be both formed and crossed. While emotions can create barriers that create separation, they can also

overcome these barriers to create understanding and solidarity. Thus, pain as an emotional experience rather than a physical experience can create connection between Sam and the young man from Palestine. By considering the sadness felt by Sam as an expression or acknowledgement of the pain felt by others, it becomes evident that sadness can create connections between those experiencing said pain and those witnessing it (Spelman, 1997).

Connections created by sadness is further exemplified by Marko, a 32-year-old activist from Lethbridge who advocates for his queer friends. My reading of Marko's narrative suggests that his position as a cisgender straight man shapes the extent to which he can understand the oppression his queer friends experience. He explains that "being a white straight guy who's also cisgender, I'm not the target." Regardless, like Sam, he also references the sadness he feels when thinking of the oppression his queer friends face when he says, "It makes me incredibly sad to see that people feel the need to be monsters, and it makes me incredibly sad to watch those victims." The binary Marko constructs here will be explored in the following section.

Both Sam's and Marko's discussion of sadness reveal the social dimensions of pain. While they may not be able to directly relate to or feel the pain of those they are seeking to help, the social dimension of pain allows Sam and Marko to understand this pain and recognize the injustice associated with it. This analysis is informed by my own experience of feeling similarly. Although I am positioned differently within the relations of power that structure their experience, the social dimensions of pain allow me to understand and recognize the injustice associated with it as well. By considering this in terms of Ahmed's (2015) theory of affective economies, pain and sadness can be understood as emotions that 'stick' to the experiences of those who they are advocating for. Ahmed discusses this in terms of the circulation of emotions reinforcing dominant discourses of oppression. Marko's and Sam's interviews reveal that emotions stick to

the oppressed in a way that might go against the dominant discourse. Specifically, sadness sticks to Palestinians for Sam, framing their Palestinian friend as in need of care and compassion. Similarly, sadness sticks to members of the LGBTQ+ community for Marko, framing them as in need of the same care and compassion. In other words, for these two activists, sadness and pain circulate through public discourses as affective economies (Ahmed, 2015), producing solidarity through the collective acknowledgement of suffering and the collective desire for change.

The sadness my participants describe in response to another's suffering does not indicate that they are sharing in that suffering, but that they are emotionally responding to it. Ahmed's discussion of pain helps clarify this distinction as it considers the social and political dimensions of pain and how pain constructs social boundaries. The sadness felt by Marko and Sam positions them in relation to another's pain as witnesses rather than bearers of that pain. In this way their emotional response becomes part of the circulation of pain that Ahmed describes, where feelings of sadness for another reflect how pain becomes meaningful and can mobilize activists to act.

Building on this distinction between witnessing another's pain and being the bearer of that pain, Roger I. Simon and Claudia Eppert (1997) argue that witnessing another's suffering carries ethical responsibilities that require more than an emotional response. In their article "Remembering Obligation: Pedagogy and the Witnessing of Testimony of Historical Trauma", the authors describe ethical witnessing as a practice or obligation to "listen and remember" (p. 176), in which the witnesses are called on to respond to suffering by acknowledging their own implications in the conditions that produce that suffering. The act of witnessing is inherently temporal as it requires an acknowledgement of past suffering and situation oneself in relation to histories of harm. For white settlers such as Sam and Marko, this means sadness for another's suffering cannot remain a self-affirming or private feeling. Instead, ethical witnessing demands

that they confront the privileges that shape their position as outsiders to the suffering, and that they respond in ways that centre the voices and needs of those who endure harm. In this sense, their sadness is not only an emotional response but is also ethically charged, signaling awareness and pushing them towards accountability for their role in the perpetuation of suffering, solidarity with the sufferer, and action against the conditions that produce that suffering.

Spelman's (1997) cautious note on how sadness can also function to objectify the sufferer and risk reinforcing hierarchies of difference between the one who feels sad, and the one who it is felt for is also important to this analysis (p. 194). In Sam's case, this distinction is crucial as their sadness for Gaza is affectively real but mediated through safety and distance. The same is true for Marko as he recognizes that he is not the target. Thus, Spelman's conceptualization shows how sadness both connects Sam and Marko to their cause through signals of moral awareness but separate them through their position as an outsider to the suffering itself. While these participants feel sad about the suffering or the other's pain, they do not feel the suffering directly, maintaining the victim as the object towards which the emotion is directed. This creates a sense of connection with the person who is suffering but maintained through a differentiation as they have not had the same experience of suffering. As such, while Sam and Marko may feel aligned with the sufferer in their suffering, they remain separated from their experience, both emotionally and socially.

Sam, Katie, Макс, and Marko's interviews indicate that sadness and pain, or the understanding of pain, are part of a parcel of the acknowledgement of suffering. It is through the affect of sadness that these interview participants come to recognize the moral dimensions of suffering and imagine a collective future that is at stake. In this sense, sadness marks the pain of injustice while creating space for the empathy and solidarity needed to sustain activism. Sadness

is therefore a retrospective emotion that allows for the recognition of wrongdoing and, as I will explore next, its transformation into anger provides the drive and energy needed for action.

3.2 Anger and Hate

The only activist I interviewed that did not raise anger as a key emotion underpinning their activist work was B. I recall feeling surprised that anger did not come up in our conversation, as he was my sixth interview and it was a theme that had started to emerge. I noted in my research journal that I would need to look through his transcript quite carefully for mention of emotions, as his answers seemed to focus more on the material resources needed to sustain activism. My surprise reveals that I had begun to anticipate anger as an affective emotion in the sustainment of activism. In doing so, I risked privileging emotional narratives over discussions of resources. B's emphasis on resources and empathy required me to question whether I had begun to read interviews through a lens that assumed anger's importance. I am making this acknowledgement at the start of this section to emphasize that how anger sustains activism is not universal. Perhaps if I had probed B more about anger specifically, it may have come up, but as my intent was to allow B to guide the conversation, I avoided bringing up specific emotions as to not elicit a disingenuous response. While anger was not universal, its recurrence across the majority of interviews compelled me to take it seriously as an interpretive thread.

If sadness reveals the presence of injustice, anger marks the refusal to accept it. This shift from sadness to anger is temporal. While sadness looks backward to acknowledge what has already occurred or been lost, anger looks forward, refusing the continuation of harm and insisting on a different future. Anger has a power that allows these activists to move into a new way of being. In this sense, anger becomes the fuel for activist efforts. The interviews revealed

that anger often emerged out of sadness. While sadness exposes suffering, the energy from anger insists that such suffering must be confronted in the form of action. Anger not only creates action but presents a moral claim as it positions the sufferer as the moral agent rather than the object of pity (Ahmed, 2015). Further Audre Lorde's (1997) notion of anger as visionary helps to highlight how anger directs the interviewees towards visions of the future that center justice. As Lorde explains, when focused with precision, anger can become "a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (p. 280). This section will explore that energy and how the interviewees use it to sustain their activist work. I acknowledge that this framing privileges readings of anger as empowering, a perspective informed by both my theoretical framework and my own investment in imagining sustainable forms of resistances.

Sorrow and its translation into anger and spite is a large part of what drives Marko's activism:

In terms of what fuels me to keep on picking the fight; spite. Spite out of either anger or sorrow. I see people being monsters and I'm just like – I feel just as bad. Feeling bad and angry for the victims' behalf is very easy. They are suffering. It is very easy and obvious to see, and it makes me angry.

In this case, "the victims" are Marko's LGBTQ+ friends who he is more than willing to defend at any opportunity. In combination with feelings of sorrow, the initial pain he feels for his friends is translated into anger which spurs action. Marko positions himself in relation to the binary he constructs as neither among the "monsters" nor the "victims". Instead, Marko sees himself as a mediating figure – someone who stands between harm and those he sees as vulnerable. He describes feeling anger and sorrow "on the victims' behalf," framing his emotional response as morally aligned with those he sees as harmed. At the same time, he describes himself as an ally, explaining how he tries to "make [his] allyship obvious and impactful." He expresses his intention to be an "affective ally" by "taking the shots so that [his queer friends] don't have to."

Through this framing, Marko positions himself as a protector who absorbs and challenges harm. His binary becomes a way of narrating his own role as both emotionally aware of suffering and compelled to address it. In this sense, Marko's anger is anticipatory as it prepares him for future confrontations and sustains his readiness to act.

While Marko frames anger as a protective force, Sam takes up anger as something visionary, treating it as a generative emotion rather than solely a defensive one. In our discussion, the transition from sadness to anger and the acknowledgement of anger's visionary power is evident:

So for the last year I have been tapping into that a lot more, of anger as a life-giving force. As a therapist I am thrilled when people are angry instead of sad. Angry is activating. Angry [means] they want to be alive; they want to do something. That's a helpful emotion and so I'm trying to do that in my own life as well. Like, I can be angry, it won't hurt me. It actually leads me to do stuff. It's a helpful emotion.

Here Sam discusses anger as “a life-giving force”, “activating” and a “helpful emotion” as it “leads me to do stuff.” The recognition of suffering through sadness often proceeds anger, which directs this recognition towards intentional action in the present. Anger is thus an emotion that is essential to Sam's activist work as its present oriented temporality pushes them to do something about the injustices they witness. It is a “helpful emotion” if harnessed effectively. Similarly, in his aforementioned quote, Marko is also harnessing the power of anger to “fuel” him to “keep on picking the fight”. Just as Lorde (1997) argues, anger provides a source of empowerment that, if tapped for its energy, can drive efforts for progressive change and combat hate.

Azi, a 25-year-old harm reduction and advocate for the unhoused, and Marko both raise the feeling of hate alongside anger. What is interesting is that both Marko and Azi do not use hate to talk about how they feel towards those perpetuating harm through upholding and benefiting

from systems of power. Rather, they invoke ‘hate’ to describe how they think those perpetuating harm feel towards those who these systems of power oppress. Hate can be understood as not just an individual feeling, but also as a political and social orientation towards an object (Ahmed, 2015). For example, Marko uses the affect of hate to describe how “problematic entities” orient themselves towards the LGBTQ+ community. Specifically, Marko describes such entities as “hateful individuals who are hating on the queer community.” Azi also discussed hate in her interview, describing how the community of Wetaskiwin feels towards its unhoused population:

The majority of the community dislike and have hate for the unhoused and they believe they should be locked up or that there shouldn’t be a shelter because other unhoused people will come from other cities to stay here.

It is worth noting that Azi does not use hate to describe how she feels towards the community of Wetaskiwin. Instead, Azi projects her anger towards how the community of Wetaskiwin feels about the unhoused community, stating “[I feel] angry because of the hate and aggression our community members face.” Azi goes on to show how her anger is translated into action:

I sometimes go back to being angry and thinking that there’s no help and things aren’t going to change and then getting back to working on those “micro-activism” times and even just simple things like speaking up or changing/correcting someone’s choice of words or challenging what they say reminds me that without participation there is no change.

In addition to showcasing how Azi translates her anger into action, the above quote also speaks to the visionary power of anger as Azi recognizes how her participation relies on a vision of the change she seeks to create. Her description of her work as “micro-activism” suggests that even what she considers the smallest of participation is still relevant and vital to creating change.

As Ahmed suggests, emotions circulate through affective economies, creating and maintaining social and political boundaries. One such emotion, hate, circulates within affective economies, binding groups together in shared opposition to others. For Marko and Azi, hate is a

way to describe the normative community's orientation towards marginalized groups—specifically the LGBTQ+ community and the unhoused community—rather than the activists' orientation towards the normative community.

My analysis defines 'normative community' as those whose identities and values are culturally positioned as the social norm and whose affective orientations are reinforced through social and institutional systems of power and oppression; those who are against queer people for Marko and those who are against the unhoused people of Wetaskiwin for Azi. This terminology reflects my own critical framing of power relations and is not language used by participants themselves. This circulation produces an affective economy of hate that binds those in alignment with the dominant community together as hateful, while simultaneously binding those most impacted—the queer community and the unhoused community—together as objects of that hate in the eyes of the normative community. Much like sadness, hate functions as a signal of wrongdoing and secures a collective that Marko and Azi see as in need of protection and help.

As emotions reflect our understanding of self (Spelman, 1997), the refusal of Marko and Azi to express hate towards the normative community is indicative of their refusal to reproduce the systems that sustain oppression as they understand oppression as hateful. Although Marko refers to certain people as “monsters,” this functions as a moral descriptor rather than an expression of hate. Hate, for Marko, is tied to destruction and harm, whereas anger is tied to protection and change. Thus, even when he labels those causing harm as “monsters”, he frames his emotional response as anger on behalf of his queer friends, not hate towards those causing harm. For Marko and Azi, to express hate would contradict their moral and political understandings of self as seeking progressive change. As the normative community harnesses the energy of hate, Marko and Azi harness the energy of the anger that their hate makes them feel.

As Lorde (1997) explains, the objective of hate is death and destruction while the objective of anger is change (p. 282). If anger is feared, it becomes useless and cannot effect change.

Much like Marko, Katie also expresses anger about the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community. She then takes that anger and harnesses it into wanting to “make that change”:

So, when I see something that I think is wrong or unjust, yes, I’ll feel hopeless, but my second instinct is “what the hell! We gotta fight now. We gotta do this. That’s not right. that’s not okay. We gotta make that change.”

Responding to injustice thus requires a translation of anger into action. In other words, anger pushes the participants in this study to do things based on how it orients them towards suffering. Specifically, anger pushes activists to fight against oppression in service of their progressive visions for the future.

This emotional transition into action unfolded for Marko when I asked him what emotions drive him to continue his activist work:

Anger and sorrow. It makes me incredibly sad to see that people feel the need to be monsters and it makes me incredibly sad to watch those victims. Then on the flip side of that is anger. So I think the two are very closely connected . . . So, to watch someone basically harm others, I think inherently just tickles my like, “This is an abuse of your power” and I just internally feel the need to be like “nuh-uh, that’s not going to fly without some serious challenges.”

Here, Marko initially leans into how “incredibly sad” he feels seeing “the victims” but this is quickly transformed into anger and an acknowledgement of how the two are connected. As Marko continues to speak, he transitions into action as he outlines how he “inherently feels the need” to go out of his way to fix the situation for those who are suffering. This reflects both the notion of anger as activating (Ahmed, 2015; Lorde, 1997) and anger as a moral stance (Spelman, 1997) as it illustrates how anger pushes Marko to challenge abuses of power which he sees as unjust. As Ahmed (2015) describes, the “passion of anger” is what pushes Marko to challenge

abuses of power. Anger, therefore, works as a driving force and a morally based action, indicative of wrongdoing and demanding of accountability or justice.

Lorde (1997) describes anger as a power-filled emotion that pushes individuals to act, so long as they do not fear its power. For Rebecca, a 23-year-old queer rights and education reform activist from Lethbridge, the risk of falling victim to the fear that can come from anger is reduced by maintaining a hopeful vision for the future:

I think you do have to lean into the positive emotions in activism. Yes, I also feel angry and yes that also drives my work, for sure, there's not a doubt about that, but I think if you can't imagine a positive world that I hope activism will bring, it's never going to come.

In combination with Sam's explanation of anger as a "helpful emotion" as it pushes them to want to do something, Rebecca highlights the importance of having a vision of the future in conjunction with the feeling of anger to effectively harness the power of anger in the right direction. In this sense, anger is not only a present-oriented emotion. Rather, when paired with a forward-looking vision of what change activists hope to make for the future, anger becomes a future-oriented emotion. This concept has been briefly considered throughout this section, but what has yet to be explored is its link to hope. As Маки explains,

I think that the anger feeds the hope because you can get angry and feel despair, and this is what I see so many of my friends doing. They kind of go down this spiral of "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. They're never going to listen" and I'm like, 'Well, it's worked in the past because people were loud, people were vocal, people were pushing back.'

Маки's insight reflects Lorde's argument that anger can serve as a catalyst for transformation.

Anger's visionary power then lies in its ability to generate hope— another forward-looking emotion that sustains activism over time.

3.3 Hope

The actions resulting from anger are reliant on the possibility of a better future, suggesting the visionary uses of anger (Ahmed, 2015; Lorde, 1997) and emphasizes the temporality of emotions. If activists are only angry about the current situation and are unable to visualize a better future, anger can only take them so far. It is that vision of a better future, one based on a particular moral compass, that allows anger to be transformed into action. Katie exemplifies this when discussing how to keep feelings of sorrow from discouraging her efforts:

It's important to sit in those feelings [of sorrow] but we also can't get lost in them. We need to try to find motivation from them and take from them something to push us forward, whether it's spite or rage, or empathy or caring, or a desire to salvage and save what we can or hope for the future. Whatever that is, take from that negative dark feeling an inspiration and a drive to move forward so that you prevent the next generation from feeling that or you lessen that feeling for yourself because you know that you were able to save something or someone along the way.

Here, Katie suggests that leaning into anger as well as hope helps transform feelings of sorrow into action. The motivation she finds from “negative dark feeling[s]” is one based in a vision of the future that would protect future generations, which is grounded in the hope of achieving the progressive change Katie seeks. In this sense, anger and hope work together to help sustain Katie's advocacy efforts. Although anger has a visionary power, hope helps ground that vision as something positive.

Ahmed's (2015) theorization of hope as visionary illuminates how activists like Rebecca sustain their work. Hope, for Ahmed, is not passive, but an active orientation towards the future that, although uncertain, holds potential. This hope of change is vital to activism as it makes it enjoyable and helps create ‘affective bonds’ circulating and creating emotional and political attachments. It allows for the overcoming of the despair that anger elicits. Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba (2023) also speak extensively to the role of hope in activism. The authors argue

that hope is essential to activism as it both drives and sustains action through its visionary power. Specifically, they argue that “in order to make change, someone must first imagine that it can be done” (p. 177) and that this ability is rooted in hope. Hayes’ and Kaba’s insights enhance Ahmed’s (2015) theorization of hope as they provide a further reflection on its visionary power. In this sense, hope is a temporal practice as it requires an acknowledgement of the effect of the past on the present, requiring action in the present rather than simply waiting for the future to unfold. Having hope keeps open the possibility for change in the future— an openness to the possibility of desire and joy.

Katie exemplifies the visionary power of hope as she argues that she must not succumb to the negative feelings but, rather, find inspiration from them to move forward. Rebecca articulates this connection as well:

I think you do have to lean into the positive emotions in activism. Yes, I also feel very angry and yes that also drives my work, for sure, there’s not a doubt about that, but I think if you can’t imagine a positive world that I hope activism will bring, it’s never going to come. So, I think we do have to stay hopeful in imagining that, even though it feels unrealistic. It will come and activism work gets us closer in whatever sense that is.

Here, Rebecca explains how anger is not enough on its own to sustain her activist efforts.

Combining anger with hope and their visionary power allows Rebecca to imagine a future that is worth fighting for, rather than being discouraged by that which she is fighting against. In this sense, hope is a forward-looking emotion that gives anger its direction. Her words illustrate that hope does not only ease despair, but functions as an affective force that propels her towards change. Sam echoes this sense of vision:

Be a dreamer, be imaginative, think big in your vision, and then in terms of expectations of the rate of change or the extent of change, take the wins at the size that you’re able to get them.

Sam's words emphasize the necessity of balancing imagination with realistic expectations. Their framing positions imagination as a temporal tool as envisioning a utopic future sustains present action, while they also acknowledge that it is important to recognize the incremental nature of progress to remain grounded and avoid disappointment.

Dayn's queer rights activist work further exemplifies how a particular vision of the future can help transform anger into action:

Even if I don't necessarily believe it some days and some days it's hard to think about it and it just feels like everything is falling apart, that little bit of 'one day it could be or will be better' keeps me from completely falling apart . . . with that anger you need something to latch on to, to point it at or you're just going to spiral into a mess of a human being.

Dayn shows how essential a vision of a better future is to translating anger into action. As Dayn suggests, without having this vision to "latch on to", activists are likely to "spiral" as their efforts lack an actionable focus. Their terminology "latch on to" perfectly exemplifies the stickiness of emotions that Ahmed suggests. Emotions are not individual, but collective experiences that move between bodies, orienting our collective desires. Dayn does not "latch on to" hope as a personal coping mechanism, but instead as an affective attachment that binds them to those who share the same goal of progressive change. The stickiness of anger and hope thus work together to sustain activism as anger sticks to the experience of injustice while hope sticks to the imagined transformed future. Katie echoes this and points to how the success of activist efforts such as being "able to save something or someone along the way" provide visible successes that further sustain activist efforts.

Hope also comes from seeing successes come out of activist efforts. For Маки, hope comes from the successes of the community events they host. Specifically, Маки finds hope in those who attend events:

Definitely seeing people coming together over a shared cause brings me a lot of hope and I feel that with all of the different programs that are hosted. I feel very fulfilled at the end of all of them because even though maybe only 10 or 40 people showed up, but to me that's huge.

Here, Маки provides a more concrete example of where their hope comes from. Through their community events Маки feels hope as “coming together over a shared cause” allows their vision for the future to seem possible. These moments of collectivity serve as present-day evidence that the imagined future is attainable, reinforcing hope's ability to bridge what is an what could be.

While Маки's hope emerges from witnessing people unite around share causes, Francine, a 19-year-old university student from Lethbridge, finds hope through her spirituality and is the only participant that discussed hope in terms of religious faith:

I guess I would also say that I feel a strong sense of responsibility and a strong sense of hope. I do believe that, I guess this is where my faith comes in, I do believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel in every situation.

Francine's connection to her faith was a unique discussion from all other participants in this study. Francine advocates for Congo is Bleeding, a campaign recognizing the ongoing exploitation and violence against the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and student rights as a member of her university's student council. Francine went on to say that “I honestly believe that I have gone through so many situations in life that could have ended me, but it didn't because of the fact that I had so much faith and hope in Jesus Christ.” As an agnostic who has little knowledge or experience with Christian faith, I am conscious of the fact that our different worldviews may shape how I interpret her claim of faith as sustaining. However, my role is not to evaluate the truth claims of faith but to attend to the meaning it holds for Francine, which I will unpack more specifically in Chapter Four. Regardless of where hope comes from, it was consistently discussed as a sustaining force by the interview participants.

3.4 Empathy

As I have discussed thus far, collectives are formed when people share the same orientation towards an injustice. More specifically, this can be seen through sadness and anger felt towards social injustices. These emotions bring folks together to create social change as well as binding those experiencing forms of social injustice with those who feel anger and sadness for their situation. These connections are further supported through hope for social justice and progressive change creating a shared vision of the future. Empathy also helps sustain activism and was mentioned in eight of my ten interviews. Empathy is a word that is tossed around a lot in today's vernacular, often losing its depth of meaning or confused with sympathy or compassion. For this reason, when empathy came up in conversation with Marko, I asked him to define the term for me:

[Long pause] My ability to see your suffering and [pause] to some extent, suffer with you is the best way I can think of defining it. I'm watching the things you're going through and it hurts me because of whatever core values I have sitting in the background. And I want to do something about it cuz it doesn't sit well with me. But I think at that point you're starting to move towards a definition of a conscience versus empathy in and of itself.

Here, Marko is connecting to this idea of suffering with the victim, pointing to the experience of empathy as driving his activism. Marko's description highlights empathy's temporal complexity as it is grounded in the past through "core values sitting in the background," felt in the present as attunement to another's suffering, and oriented towards future action through his desire to intervene. Marko's words can be further understood through Ahmed's (2015) theorization on the difference between compassion, empathy, sympathy, and pity as varying forms of "fellow-feeling". Ahmed explains that "fellow-feeling", a term coined by Robert C. Solomon, suggests the ability to feel with someone or be moved by their experience (p. 41). Ahmed argues that fellow-feelings involve an element of fantasy as those experiencing "fellow feeling" must

imagine or assume to know what those they ‘feel for’ are feeling. Therefore, when ‘feeling for’ someone, there is also a ‘feeling about’ their situation. Because of Marko’s “core values sitting in the background”, he recognizes or imagines the experience of those suffering as unjust and can empathize with them. This empathy then makes him “want to do something about it cuz it doesn’t sit well with me”, suggesting how empathy sustains his activist work as a present-oriented emotion.

While Marko highlights the motivation resulting from empathy, Dayn points to its limits, providing a cautionary note about empathy, suggesting that on its own, it can only do so much:

I think part of it is also those feelings of anger and fear about what is going on. As much as it is, you want to look at the positives of it, I don’t think activism would be possible without those because you can be super caring and super empathetic but if you’re not angry about what’s going on, what you’re doing is only going to go so far.

Spelman (1997) presents an analysis of the role of compassion in political life, suggesting that compassion and empathy are often used interchangeably in ordinary discourse. Her analytical discussion of compassion and pity therefore also apply to empathy. Spelman cautions that compassion and empathy can easily slip into pity (p. 83). The danger here is that when someone shows empathy and compassion it can allow them to feel good, while not doing anything about the injustice they witness. Compassion, therefore, does not necessarily require action and can easily transition into pity; an emotion that provides little to no fuel for progressive change. As Dayn suggests, an emotion like anger is essential alongside empathy as it provides a driving force that keeps fellow-feelings from collapsing into actionless pity. Dayn’s insight highlights empathy’s temporal position: while empathy sustains activists over time, it does not have the forward moving momentum that anger provides. Fellow-feelings in conjunction with anger, are therefore essential to sustaining activism, emphasizing the interconnectedness of emotions and how they work together in the fight for progressive change.

Empathy alone may not possess the spark needed to push activists to action, but it provides the emotional perseverance that sustains activism over time. Katie explains this most eloquently:

So, while I think the rage and everything, all those big powerful emotions are the start. I think this is true for most people who do this type of work, I don't think it's just me. I think we start from a place of reactivity, but we end up in a place of deep caring and deep understanding of "This is what we should be doing and this is what we shouldn't be doing."

Katie acknowledges anger or rage as the emotional impetus for activism, but that over time, these reactive emotions fade and the sustained efforts to help come from "a place of deep caring and deep understanding." This transformation demonstrates how emotions shape our orientation towards each other as they move bodies, both literally and figuratively (Ahmed, 2015). Whereas anger directed at those benefiting from dominant systems of power fuels resistance, empathy is directed at those suffering under the same dominant systems of power, sustaining connection. Spelman (1997) reminds us that while fellow-feelings can bridge difference, they also require attention to the distinct position of the suffer and those who witness suffering. Katie's movement away from rage and towards empathy exemplifies this shift as anger propels her to action, while empathy sustains her. Thus, anger creates the initial spark for action, and empathy is what sustains the effort.

This analysis is not meant to contradict my aforementioned claim that anger is also sustaining. Rather, it is intended to highlight that emotions are never static; they move, circulate, and do things (Ahmed, 2015), but not always in a linear or predictable way. Emotions can push activists to do things in different ways depending on circumstance and individual understanding. So, for some, anger can be a sustaining force while for others, it might not be. For example, throughout my interview with B, anger was never mentioned. As previously discussed, B is the only interviewee who did not discuss anger as part of what sustains his work. This shows how

the role of emotions in sustaining activism is not uniform but can vary person to person. For this reason, B provides a unique example highlighting how in some cases empathy can provide its own driving force:

I think it's like empathy really is kind of the main thing because it's like, one of the things I do at the shelter when I was working there was I wouldn't dress as warm as I possibly could; I would dress as warm as I needed to be and if I was a little bit uncomfortable during my shift, perfect, because the guys that I'm watching are numbing it with fentanyl and they don't know that they've been out in the cold for 6 hours, but I do and I know that my feet hurt so I can remind them like "Hey you're probably freezing, so why don't you go inside?" And some of them just need that little push. Some of them just need somebody to be like "Hey, you've been out here for a little while, why don't you go in and warm up?" and then they get up and go in and go warm up.

Rather than viewing empathy as metaphorically 'putting yourself in someone else's shoes', B tries to actually feel what the homeless community is feeling. To help the homeless community he supports, he recognizes their inability to feel the cold and puts himself in their shoes so he can feel it for them and help keep them safe. Empathy, for B, therefore, has its own driving force that does not require the impetus or push of anger to move him to action. Empathy is the present-tense engagement with another's suffering, one that draws on past experiences of harm and aims to prevent them in the future.

Rebecca provides another example of how emotions are never static, arguing that anger has its place in activism, but needs to be replaced with empathy in certain situations. Because Rebecca's anger towards far-right policies and supporters can become a barrier to understanding between the far-right and those who support more progressive leftist policies. Rebecca explains as follows:

I think right now both sides are very heated and very angry, and rightfully so. I really want to stress that I am not trying to invalidate the people that are angry, but I think that compassion is what we need more of and compassion is what is going to change people's minds.

Rebecca explains that anger is not a receptive emotion when trying to “change people’s minds.” Instead, she advocates for the use of empathy to build bridges between those on opposite ends of the political spectrum. In this sense, Rebecca’s understanding of empathy moves beyond solidarity and extends towards creating connections with those who perpetuate harm. This type of empathy seeks to create the possibility of connection, whereas anger might close off this possibility. Ahmed offers an understanding of this dynamic by arguing that emotions shape how bodies come together and move apart. In this case, anger can create barriers between groups whereas empathy has the potential to overcome them. Rebecca’s call for compassion is therefore not a denial of anger’s power, but a recognition of its limits in certain contexts. When the goal is connection and understanding rather than resistance, empathy functions as a political tool that can move bodies together, rather than apart.

3.5 Love

Akin to empathy, love is another important emotion that sustains the activism of nine of the ten interview participants by creating connection and moving bodies together. Unlike anger which propels action or empathy which grounds activist in the present, love is an enduring emotion. It stretches across time, drawing on past relationships, sustain present commitment, and orienting activists towards futures in which those they care about can live safely. Marko advocates for his friends who experience forms of oppression that he does not. Although he cannot directly relate to their experiences, Marko points to the love he feels for his friends as part of what makes his activism successful:

I don’t know how big you are to evolution, I was a huge nerd on it, but our evolutionary branch, we have succeeded as a species because the traits of [pause] I guess expressing love in the form of collaboration, curiosity, working together, taking care of one another, either looking past or embracing differences, we as a species succeeded because these were major traits that came out of our evolutionary heritage.

Marko's expression of love here is one that acknowledges the role of love in creating connection and belonging within a movement by working together, taking care of each other, and "looking past or embracing differences." Love works to connect Marko to those he is advocating for as it creates a likeness that binds him, as the lover, to the object of that love: his LGBTQ+ friends (Ahmed, 2015). Thus, in expressing love through collective care and collaboration, Marko demonstrates how the use of love as a political orientation allows him and those he is advocating for to approximate a shared ideal— such as equity, equality, and justice. This highlights how love is involved in the success and sustainment of activism.

Importantly, the love described by participants is not romantic or confined to personal relationships, but extends out as a political relation to others, including community members, and strangers. This reflects how love can operate as a collective and ethical orientation rather than an intimate emotion. As Ahmed suggests, love moves between bodies, shaping attachments between people, communities, and activist causes. In this sense, activist love goes beyond romantic connection and functions as a social force that binds activists to the causes they care about and the people these causes impact.

Not all activists can remain separated from the injustices they advocate against as they may directly impact them as well. Many of the interview participants do experience the forms of oppression that they are advocating to change. For example, Dayn advocates for queer rights and also identify as a member of this community. Interestingly, Dayn does still talk about their activist efforts in terms of helping others and not themselves, exemplified by the following quote:

90% of my friends are LGBT in some way. I myself am non-binary, pansexual, gender fluid, just super queer. And my good friends are lesbians, my friend who I met because he also grooms my cat is transgender and so I love all of those people and I want them to be safe and happy. So, to be able to go through things and actively stand up for them, it's because I love them and I want them to be safe.

Here, Dayn explains how they are a member of the LGBT community but largely discusses their activist efforts as oriented through the love they have for their friends and the desire for them to be safe. Love pushes Dayn into action, bridging the personal and the political. The love Dayn feels for their community is not sentimental but political as it actively resists the structures or cisheteronormativity that oppress this community. In this sense, love functions as a bridge across time, connecting past struggle to future possibilities. Dayn also resists using hate, as previously discussed, explaining that they would rather lean into the love they hold for the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than expressing hate towards anti-queer systems of power and those who support them, Dayn states, “as much as I can say “fuck people” or “I hate people”, I have a lot of people that I love and I have a lot of people that I love that I don’t even know.”

Many participants discuss the love they have for the activist work that they do. For example, Emily states, “I love to advocate for education” and “I love the work that I do at [climate justice organization]”, and how both aim to create a better future for her son. Similarly, B describes joining a group to make sandwiches for the homeless and how he “fell in love with it.” B goes on to explain, “I do [my activist work] for the love of it. But I don’t consider love an emotion, I consider love an action.” In this sense, love is never static: it is continually renewed through ongoing activist practice. In my conversation with Sam, this is echoed as they bring up bell hooks’ version of love describing it as “love is a verb, love is an action. To love somebody is to do something” and suggests that “the foundation of activism needs to be love.” Sam goes on to say,

That is actually where we are all acting from. I think that’s what differs an activist action from any other action is it’s one made with a desire for social change but the reason for a desire for social change is love. So I think love and community are probably the two pillars of all activism work. I don’t know if we all recognize that when we’re doing our activism, especially in our earlier days, but yeah I think it is a sustaining force. I think

that if you are acting from a place of love, that is [pause] love is a sustaining force, I don't have better words than that!

Love is not just a feeling but an active force that does things— it binds, excludes, justifies, and reinforces social structures. Love functions as a form of emotional labour that binds activists to their cause and allows them to feel a sense of connection and belonging within their movement and those they are advocating for. Love is thus essential to sustaining activist efforts as it moves beyond a romantic connection and becomes both an orientation towards those who are being advocated for, and the advocacy work itself. Sam also points to community as an important element of this discussion. This will be unpacked further in Chapter Four.

3.6 Summary

Emotions are undoubtedly an important element that sustain activism. As this chapter has demonstrated, sadness functions as a morally retrospective emotion that signals awareness of injustice, while anger operates as future-oriented emotion that provides both a moral and motivational force in activism that transforms the recognition of past and present injustice into political action. The refusal to express hate demonstrates the interview participants' commitment to social justice as they acknowledge the hate directed towards the oppressed without reproducing it themselves. The way anger pushes activists to act does not suggest that the feeling of sadness has been left behind; rather, the retrospection of sadness is translated across time into a focused energy that can be used to challenge injustice. The emotional awareness of suffering, paired with the future-oriented emotion of hope, enables activists to harness their anger and sadness and use them as fuel to purposefully effect progressive change. Further, empathy and love connect activists to those who are suffering, sustaining and driving transformative work when paired with action-oriented emotions such as anger. Together, these emotions form a temporal group: sadness looks back, anger pushes forward, hope imagines ahead, empathy

grounds activists in the present, and love stretches across past, present, and future to sustain collective action.

Although emotions play a crucial role in sustaining activism, they are not sufficient on their own to ensure long-term engagement. Emotions move activists towards action and help to sustain their efforts, but they do so within material and social conditions. The capacity to act on these emotions is shaped by the resources available to activists as they navigate the demands of their everyday lives. Emotions may motivate and guide activist work, but resources determine how and when that work can take place. These enabling and limiting conditions or resource availability are explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: Sustaining the Work Together: The “Juggling Act” of Resource Allocation

Activism takes place alongside the demands of everyday life such as employment, caring duties, post-secondary education, and the general needs of basic survival. Given these demands, the activists I interviewed are continuously negotiating how, when, and where to allocate their personal resources. This chapter explores how activists sustain their engagement in activism over time by managing material, and relational resources. It considers how discretionary resources such as money, time, and unpaid labour sustain both the individual activist and their cause(s). Not only do I consider the availability of discretionary resources, but also the social relations and structural conditions that shape how these resources are distributed, accessed, and maintained.

Drawing on resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), this chapter analysis how resources enable and constrain activist participation, while extending this framework through the consideration of scholarship on mutual aid, collective care, burnout, privilege, and collective identity. It considers how power, systemic inequality, and social position shape access to resources, vulnerability to burnout, and activists’ capacity to remain engaged or need to withdraw. Overall, this chapter argues that sustaining activism depends not only on the availability of resources, but on how those resources are relationally negotiated within systems of power, care, and community.

4.1 Discretionary Resources

McCarthy & Zald (1977) argue against the assumption that social movements emerge and persist due to shared grievances or moral commitment. Instead, they suggest a “resource mobilization theory” (RMT), arguing that social movements depend on discretionary resources—resources that are not fixed but are allocated voluntarily by individuals (p. 1224). Some of these

key resources are money, time, and labour, which are often supplied by individual activists through unpaid and informal participation. This framework suggests that movements are sustained by people who can donate their time and money and provide unpaid labour to compensate for a lack of institutional funding, as movements are more likely to fail due to a lack of resources than a lack of commitment to the cause.

While the RMT framework can be applied to understand why movements rely on discretionary resources to sustain their work, it provides a limited analysis of the emotional and relational costs that this dependency places on individual activists. Further, while RMT is useful for understanding how movements rely on discretionary resources such as time, money, and labour, it fails to consider that these contributions are not neutral— they are unevenly distributed and impacted by their shared necessity for activist personal subsistence and well-being, and capacity to avoid burnout.

Dean Spade's (2020) framework of mutual aid complicates McCarthy and Zald's (1977) notion of discretionary resources. Here, discretionary resources alone do not sustain activism. Instead, Spade suggests that sustainability of activism depends on whether movements cultivate practices of solidarity and collective care that allow activists to meet their own day-to-day needs while simultaneously contributing to social justice work. Spade's work deepens my analysis by shifting attention away from solely considering the availability of discretionary resources, to the consideration of the social relations that impact how these resources are managed and distributed. This combined approach allows for an analysis that considers how voluntary contributions of resources can sustain movements while simultaneously producing burnout in individual activists if collective care and mutual aid are absent. While McCarthy and Zald suggests that movements are more likely to fail due to a lack of resources, Spade expands this

analysis by suggesting that such resource shortages often occur do to a lack collective care and mutuality.

To see how these dynamics unfold, B's reflection speaks extensively to his use of discretionary resources through his work for Sage Clan, but also illustrates the shortcomings of considering these resources through a purely RMT lens:

Sage Clan has never paid me. I have gone out of pocket for Sage Clan. I have no idea how much money I've spent on gas, food — I have no idea. I couldn't even tell you how many hours I've been with Sage Clan because it's just so random over the years. When I was making the lunches for 4 months I was like "well okay, I do the lunches twice a week for about a couple hours each time. I can calculate that" but then it became much more amorphous. Half of what Sage Clan is, is making sure that those connections happen. So, if somebody wants to donate some blankets and we don't have anyone to pick it up, I'll get a phone call at 10am on a random school day like "Hey, can you pick up these blankets?" and there's an hour window for me to pick it up before my class starts. So, I zip on over, get them to storage, zip on back. I don't bother with that calculation. I don't care about how much I've given to Sage Clan because the perspective that I've received because of my involvement in the organization has paid for itself 100 times over.

B's account illustrates how individual activists and their discretionary resources play an important role in sustaining grassroots forms of mutual aid, in this case Sage Clan. B helps sustain Sage Clan monetarily by covering out-of-pocket expenses, providing un-paid labour by picking up material donations, and by committing significant amounts of time in various ways. As B explains, once his involvement became "amorphous", he stopped calculating the hours he invests. Importantly, B does not frame his involvement as only benefitting in one direction. Instead, he emphasizes the reciprocity and mutuality he experiences through his relationships with the homeless community he supports.

Spade's (2020) theorization of mutual aid helps conceptualize this acknowledgement in a way that RMT cannot. While McCarthy and Zald's (1977) framework categorizes B's contributions as discretionary resources that materially sustain Sage Clan, it offers a limited analysis of how B conceptualizes his labour and why he continues to participate. Spade's

framework fills this gap as it emphasizes the role of mutual aid rooted in reciprocity and collective care in sustaining activism, rather than focusing solely on the redistribution of resources. Spade contends that mutual aid is a form of political participation in which new social relations are built through people taking responsibility for each other. Rather than participating in symbolic acts, mutual aid creates a change in political conditions, creating strategies for survival through collective care and solidarity (p. 136). From this perspective, B's refusal to track the time and money he contributes to Sage Clan rejects the transactional or charity-based logic of RMT that frames giving as a sacrifice in one direction. B's statement that "the perspective that I've received because of my involvement in the organization has paid for itself 100 times over" reflects a relationship of solidarity in which the care and connection built through relationships with the unhoused community function to sustain B.

In some cases, monetary resources do not come from individual dedication, such as B's contributions to Sage Clan, but are channeled through institutions. Katie highlights this contrast when comparing where the Campus Collective Centre (CCC) and Q Space, both university campus organizations that support the LGBTQ+ community, garner their monetary resources. While the CCC is a levy group funded through fees attached to student tuition, the funding for Q Space comes through donations and limited club funds from the Student's Union. While the CCC can pay employees, Q Space relies on volunteers. Katie explains how the reliance on unpaid labour impacts Q Space's capacity to sustain itself:

[Q Space's] capacity to do work is much more limited [than the CCC] because the time that you would be giving to your organization is time you have to take away from subsistence, time you have to take away from coursework. So, it becomes a juggling act when you don't have people who can be paid to do the labour, even just a few to do that heavy lifting and the day-to-day. It can become a very big barrier to doing big, impactful work and it becomes hard to sustain.

As Katie's account illustrates, the absence of institutional funding pushes Q Space towards a reliance on voluntary labour, where activists must divert resources necessary for their own subsistence— like time from coursework— towards sustaining the club.

Interpreted through McCarthy and Zald's (1977) RMT, this reflects inconsistent access to discretionary resources, making Q Space more vulnerable to instability and impacting its long-term sustainability. Spade (2020) critiques this charity-based model of organizing, providing a framework for a deeper analysis of the political conditions that produce this scarcity in the first place. Spade argues that a reliance on voluntary labour to compensate for a lack of institutional funding individualizes the responsibility for meeting collective needs and does not recognize the structural conditions that produce scarcity in the first place (p. 137). Using Spade's framework, Q Space's reliance on voluntary labour can be understood as reflecting a political economy in which students are expected to make up for institutional shortcomings through personal sacrifice— an expectation that can constrain sustainability. This expectation, Spade suggests, undermines sustainability as it normalizes individuals overextending themselves rather than building collective care.

4.2 Privilege

Privilege is a resource that cannot be overlooked. As Peggy McIntosh (1989) explains in her now classic article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack", whiteness is a structure of power that confers material advantages on white people. McIntosh argues that the silence and denial of white privilege allows this social system of oppression to remain in place, keeping "the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects" (p.33). Importantly, McIntosh distinguishes between earned strength and unearned power, noting that privilege can appear

individual when it is in fact “permission to escape or to dominate” granted by social systems of power (p. 32). This distinction makes clear that privilege is not an individual characteristic, but a structural relation produced through unequal systems of power. While some advantages, such as safety and fair treatment, should be universal, their uneven distribution highlights how power operates to protect some while rendering others vulnerable.

Whiteness and white supremacy are not the only systems of power that should be considered when discussing the uneven distribution of power. All systems of power confer advantages on to people, including racism, heteropatriarchy, cisnormativity, and class inequality. These systems of power and oppression interlock, operating relationally and intersecting to shape who is exposed to harm and who is not (Crenshaw, 1989). As McIntosh (1989) cautions, the silence surrounding privilege allows these systems to remain unchallenged, rendering unearned advantage invisible and systemic (p. 33). As an activist, it is therefore essential to be cognisant of advantages conferred through systems of power if the goal is to dismantle these oppressive systems.

In her study of white and Western activists participating in transnational solidarity work, Gada Mahrouse (2014) examines how activists navigate the racialized power relations that shape their activism. She contends that activists’ social positions afford them access to safety and credibility, and that meaningful solidarity requires ongoing reflexivity about how their privilege operates. When activists critically engage with their privilege, Mahrouse suggests that they “can respond in ways that are responsible and useful” (p 77), using their relative protection and access to challenge rather than reproduce unequal power relations. Although the interviewees in this study do not participate in transnational solidarity activism, Mahrouse’s discussion of racial

privilege provides a framework to understand all forms of privilege as both resources and constraints in sustaining activism.

Drawing on Mahrouse and McIntosh, this section approaches privilege not only as a systemically conferred advantage but as a relational effect of unequal systems of power that shapes access to discretionary resources, safety, credibility, and the ability to withdrawal. Rather than considering privilege as an individual attribute, I consider how it is embedded in, and a product of unequal power relations, and how it can be intentionally deployed in activism to create change and sustain activist work. Specifically, this section explores how privilege emerges through social relations that position some people as able to absorb social harm for others and to step away from conflict during times of overwhelm or burnout.

Marko identifies as a white, cisgender, straight man, which, in his account, shields him from the intersections of sexism, racism, and heterosexism. Marko recounts,

Being a white straight guy who's also cisgender, I'm not the target. If I take a day off, I don't have hateful people chasing me. I don't have hateful people trying to ruin my life, trying to tell me I'm sinful, trying to tell me all sorts of other garbage. That doesn't trail me. I can walk away and that makes it really easy for me to conserve energy because there isn't anybody chasing me. I can only imagine the overwhelming feeling of some of my less privileged friends who don't have this option; who don't get to walk away.

In this quote Marko emphasizes how acutely aware he is of his privilege and how the systems of power he benefits from (heterocisnormativity, white supremacy, and patriarchy) shield him from experiences of discrimination and systemic harm. As discussed in Chapter Three, hate functions as a moral signal that sustains the binary through which Marko understands social harm, situating him not as a victim or a perpetrator, but as someone who intervenes on behalf of those he sees as in need of protection. More specifically, for Marko, hate signals wrongdoing in a way that reinforces his self-understanding as an “affective ally” who feels compelled to absorb harm on behalf of the queer community. By stating that, “I’m not the target”, Marko is not describing a

personal trait but acknowledging how systems of power position him as safe from harm and outside of the effective economy of hate that ‘sticks’ to queer people, labeling them as worthy of hate. His ability to “walk away” signals what McIntosh (1989) describes as “permission to escape” (p. 32), a relation of domination that allows him to conserve both emotional and physical resources in ways unavailable to his queer friends. This capacity to strategically withdraw without personal consequence functions as a resource that sustains his activism.

What is important to note is that Marko does not use his white, male, cis privilege to withdraw. Instead, Marko describes intentionally putting himself in situations where that privilege can shield him to absorb harm for others:

I can take a lot of hits to my social standing before it’s actually really going to have a palpable effect on me. Not everyone can! And so, I can use that. I can use that to help empower others, to give others the room to think while I take the verbal and social beating.

For Marko, privilege operates as a relational form of protection that he can intentionally deploy to protect those facing injustice. His position within systems of power reduces his exposure to harm, affording him the ability to take risks that others cannot safely take. Mahrouse’s (2014) discussion of self-reflexivity emphasizes that activists must remain attentive to how their social position shapes both their capacity to act and the effects of that action.

From this perspective, Marko’s reflection illustrates a reflexive awareness of how his position within intersecting systems of power afford him the protections that others may not have. Marko is not only aware of his social position but is actively using it as a resource which can take the risk that others cannot afford. By taking on “the verbal and social beating”, Marko is attempting to protect and aid his queer friends by giving them “room to think”; a conscious use of his privilege as a resource that benefits a collective. In other words, Marko uses the safety that being white, male, and cis affords him as a resource to offer protection to his queer friends. As

Mahrouse suggests, this redistribution of safety afforded by systems of power is intended to allow activists to “pass on some sense of safety through their presence, with limited risk to themselves” (p. 45).

For some participants, privilege emerges as a resource which can be deployed for their own survival rather than as protection for others. Dayn, a non-binary activist, benefits from fewer systems of power than Marko, yet still describes how the systems they do benefit from afford them the ability to strategically withdraw when needed:

Having the privilege to pick and choose and having the privilege to occasionally turn it off and be like “I am going to not think about this right now” is a) a complete privilege and b) it’s honestly what has kept me alive because if I didn’t have a choice and I had to think about it 24/7 because it was actively affecting me directly, I don’t think I would be handling it as well as I am.

Mahrouse and McIntosh both present frameworks that recognize that privilege is unevenly distributed and never absolute. While Dayn is closer to harm due to their gender identity, they still recognize how they benefit from other systems of power (e.g. white supremacy, socioeconomic status). These systemic advantages afford Dayn the ability to temporarily disengage. Rather than offering them safety that they can use to protect others like Marko, Dayn’s withdrawal functions as a survival strategy against the systems of power that threaten their well-being as a non-binary person in the face of ongoing exposure to discrimination.

As Dayn explains, this use of privilege “keeps [them] alive” and without it they would not be “handling it as well as [they are].” This contrast highlights how privilege structures not only who can participate, but how participation is sustained under uneven conditions. While Marko’s privilege allows him to step in and absorb harm, it allows Dayn to step back and manage exposure to harm, sustaining their efforts in the long run. Dayn reiterates this in the following quote: “being aware that it is a privilege to get to pick and choose and being okay with

the fact that I'm using that privilege because I have to or else I will spiral completely." Dayn's recognition that how their privilege as a white person affords them the ability to withdraw comes not out of comfort or detachment, but as a means of preventing psychological distress. This highlights how racial privilege can function as a resource for managing exposure to harm and sustain participation in activism over the long run.

Reflecting on Dayn's words, I found myself thinking back to the impetus for this research. The fact that my friends and I can feel sadness or anger about oppressions that do not directly impact us and translate that into paralysis rather than action indicates the protective distance we are afforded by our social location and relative privilege. Unlike Dayn, who withdraws strategically to manage exposure to harm, our emotional paralysis reflects the absence of immediate threat. In this sense, stepping back can become comfortable and habitual when our safety is not at stake. Privilege therefore does not simply enable activism, but it can also enable inaction when the stakes are low. Reflecting on Marko's account further complicates this reflection. For him, his social location affords him the ability to step in and absorb harm—a framing that unsettles the ease with which withdrawal has become normalized for me and my friends. In listening to him, I was confronted with the fact that privilege confers responsibility to endure discomfort and risk when others cannot, reframing my privilege as a resource that can be mobilized into solidarity.

Privilege can also offer credibility. Mahrouse's (2014) study highlights how racialized and geopolitical hierarchies shape whose voices are perceived as credible within activist spaces. In her research, Mahrouse found that white and Western activists are often presumed to be rational and fair-minded an assumption not equally extended to those affected by injustice (p. 72). The following quote from Rebecca demonstrates how similar dynamics operate within

queer activism, where her position as a white, cisgender woman affords credibility to her queer rights work:

I exist as a very privileged human on a lot of levels. I think because of my privilege, more people I don't want to say take me seriously but, I think I'm less easily brushed off because I am not the image of queerness in anti-queer people's minds. I think gender diverse humans are attacked heavily on that front and just the stereotypical queer look is something that the right really attacks heavily but when I show up as a white, cis, woman, people aren't as quick to brush me off and not listen to what I have to say. So, I think for sure privilege makes my activist work a lot easier than other people involved in the work.

Rebecca's suggests that her appearance as a "white, cis, woman" rather than the "image of queerness in anti-queer people's minds" affords her the advantages of being listened to and not immediately discounted due to the intersecting systems of power she benefits from—cishnormativity, heteronormativity, and white supremacy. These advantages make her activist work "a lot easier" as she is "less easily brushed off" based on appearance. This is also reflective of McIntosh's (1989) claim that unearned advantages can offer protection from hostility and distress (p. 32), giving those benefitting from such advantages the ability to be listened to and not immediately discounted. Rebecca's experience can be understood as not an individual advantage but a systemic advantage that amplifies her voice while silencing others.

While Rebecca highlights how privilege can make activism "a lot easier", Sam considers how the advantages afforded through privilege can become a barrier:

I think privilege is often actually a barrier for folks to be effective activists and as somebody who has privilege, and a ton of it, I use that as a thing to remind myself about like, "Oh you're tired today? That's cute." [laughs] "How about you sleep in an extra half-hour and make yourself a lovely breakfast and then use that energy to do something!" Because so many people don't have that. They don't have those things at their disposal.

Sam's acknowledgement of privilege as a barrier for some aligns with Mahrouse's (2014) argument that privilege can create distance from injustice, making it easier for those protected by systems of power to disengage from struggle. As Mahrouse contends, privilege offers relative

safety and stability. Those benefiting from systems of power may be less exposed to the harms that create the forms of oppression that activists seek to change. McCarthy's and Zald's (1977) observation similarly suggests that those benefiting from systems of power and who therefore have access to and control over more discretionary resources are often "those least likely to feel discontentment concerning their own personal circumstances" (p. 1226). While McCarthy and Zald treat resources as largely material, Sam's account foregrounds the emotional and ethical dimensions of privilege. Mahrouse (2014) emphasizes that activists who benefit from systems of power must remain critical and attentive to how their relative protection shapes their capacity to engage or disengage. She does not treat privilege as something passive that can create distance from struggle, but as a relational position that requires active accountability. Sam's account shows that privilege does not automatically lead to complacency but can be actively reworked for motivation. Racial and economic privilege therefore should not be viewed as something Sam possesses, but as relational protections that they must actively and continuously manage through reflexivity, and self-accountability.

Sam's account can be understood as responding to what Mahrouse (2014) describes as "a moral imperative for those of us in privileged positions to respond to calls for solidarity" (p. 152). Mahrouse goes on to suggest that, "solidarity needs to be conceived as both a central element of effective political movements and as a set of practices that rely on racialized and gendered structures of colonialism and imperialism" (p. 152). Sam's reflexive engagement with their fatigue demonstrates an awareness of this tension. Rather than their participation being purely virtuous, Sam remains attentive to how their privilege structures their capacity to act. Their privilege allows them to overcome their exhaustion with a good sleep and breakfast—a luxury not afforded to everyone. In this way, Sam frames their privilege as a reminder of how

systems of power benefit them while disadvantaging others and uses it to sustain their activist efforts rather than as an excuse to disengage.

Sam also speaks to how their economic privilege allows them to contribute to forms of activism that are more financially draining, such as financially supporting their friend in Palestine:

I am lucky that I work in a profession that is a little bit more financially providing than a lot of jobs are, although I can only do my job part-time [pause] for a variety of reasons. But, some of that is like “Okay, if I want to support this guy, then I need to work enough to have money to support him with” which means I need to put energy and time into work, which means that can’t go to something else. I can’t work less to balance my emotional budget.

As previously discussed, McCarthy’s and Zald’s (1977) resource mobilization framework suggests that individuals with greater access to discretionary resources— such as money and time— are more likely to sustain participation in activist efforts. This is directly correlated to the proportion of time and money necessary to meet basic needs, suggesting that increases in unearned privilege (more money and free time) allow for an increase in available discretionary resources (p. 1224). Sam’s account illustrates this framework in action as the ability to contribute financially correlates to more disposable income due to Sam’s capacity to allocate more time to paid work.

Mahrouse’s (2014) theorization furthers this analysis. Rather than treating their financial stability as neutral, Sam recognizes it as an outcome of structural relations that afford them access to resources not equally available to others, and frames this position as a responsibility that informs how they choose to engage in activism. As Mahrouse suggests, privilege is not simply something one possesses, but something that must be actively negotiated. Sam’s reflection exemplifies this as they recognize the opportunities economic privilege affords them as well as the limits it imposes. While Sam’s financial stability allows them to support their friend

in Palestine, it also limits other forms of activist participation, as financially supporting their friend is heavily reliant on Sam having paid work and the time investment this requires. As such, Sam's experience demonstrates how their economic and racial privilege functions as both a material resource and a moral framework— one that enables sustained activism while demanding the constant negotiation of resource allocation.

As I have highlighted, privilege is not an individual attribute or possession, but a systemically conferred and unevenly distributed resource that shapes how activism is practiced and sustained. Privilege emerges through social relations that position some activists as more protected and credible, while granting them access to more resources than others. Interviewees' accounts emphasize that privilege can be strategically deployed to absorb harm by using their relative safety to protect others, withdrawing when necessary, as a survival strategy, and by granting legitimacy to their voices. Further, privilege can also be reworked to provide motivation rather than defaulting into complacency and determine how material resources are allocated and mobilized. When made visible and intentionally considered, privilege can sustain participation, but when left unexamined, it risks reproducing the very systems of power that activists seek to challenge. This relational dimension of privilege points to the importance of community and relationships as key resources in further sustaining activist efforts, as I will explore in the following section.

4.3 Community and Relationships

Community and relationships emerged as important resources in all of the interviews. While B and Маки consider community a foundational support to their grassroots organizing in the form of monetary and material donations and volunteer labour, others discussed the sense of community— both human or non-human— they receive through their activism and how it

sustains their efforts. Working alongside like-minded people in a community and having the supports that community spaces like these offer is important to sustaining their activist work. Some participants, such as Emily, also pointed to the sustaining nature of personal relationships when community is lacking. Community and relationships are therefore important to sustaining activist efforts as they create the solidarity needed to persevere through hard times and sustain activist efforts over the long term.

To understand how community sustains activism, I now turn to an examination of how shared identity, ethical commitments, and relational care foster a sense of belonging that enables activists to remain engaged over time. Drawing on Polletta and Jasper's (2001) concept of collective identity and Montgomery and bergman's (2017) theorization of moral clarity and witnessing harm, this section explores how activists come to understand themselves as part of a collective struggle and how this shared orientation strengthens their commitment to their activist efforts. By focusing on the relational and affective dimensions of activism, this section demonstrates how community and relationships function as critical resources in sustaining activist engagement.

4.3.1 Community

As members of the LGBTQ+ community, both Katie and Dayn advocate for injustices that they and their community face. For them, collective identity is formed through demographic sameness, as they are members of the group they are advocating for. This is not the case for the rest of the interview participants. Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper (2001) suggest that collective identity is not always based on demographic sameness but "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced

directly” (p. 285). This framework helps explain why many interviewees support causes they are not directly impacted by (e.g. not identifying as queer and advocating for queer rights) and may not participate in formal community organizing. For these activists, their connection to their chosen cause(s) comes from a sense of moral community rather than literal or physical community. Nick Montgomery and carla bergman (2017) suggest that activists are sustained by the moral clarity that comes from witnessing harm and the shared commitment to addressing it. Moral community can therefore be understood as community built not from demographic sameness but through the shared moral commitments and motivations that come from witnessing harm, and the shared belief that collective action is needed to confront injustice.

This is exemplified by Emily who advocates for environmental rights through her work with an environmental NGO where collective identity is based on moral claim rather than demographic sameness. This community sustains her work as everyone working for the NGO shares the moral understanding that the environment needs to be protected. Emily explains as follows:

The environmental field is always a small community so you always kind of see the same people at different events, but within my specific organization there is a very strong sense of community and support from an amazing group of people that I work with.

Here, Emily’s shared identity with other environmental activists sustains her work as it creates a community that offers support through a sense of belonging based in collective moral motivations and commitments. This shared commitment to change provides an emotional grounding that enables activists like Emily to remain engaged over the long term.

Маки also exemplifies the power of a moral community in the following quote. With their organization Touch Grass Club, Маки recognizes that given the current political climate in

Alberta, creating communities of like-minded individuals would be necessary to effect progressive change:

I want people to be engaged and so Touch Grass Club was kind of born out of that need for community engagement on these issues and these ideas and sharing information and resources. Cuz to me, I think it's incredibly important and I think that more than ever we need to find ways to work together but also find common ground.

Through their club, Маки hosts programs aimed at helping various causes such as raising awareness about climate change and cooking food to serve to the homeless. Маки explains that the community this creates sustains their efforts:

Seeing people coming together over a shared cause brings me a lot of hope and I feel that with all of the different programs that are hosted. I feel very fulfilled at the end of all of them because even if maybe only 10 or 40 people showed up, that's huge to me.

As Маки suggests “people coming together over a shared cause” fulfills them. These community building programs are not based in demographic sameness, but a shared moral claim, whether that be environmental justice or helping the unhoused. Further, the sense of fulfilment and hope Маки describes reflects how moral community is itself a resource that provides the emotional support necessary to sustain their activist efforts. In this sense, community generates hope that in turn sustains activism through its visionary and affective power. As discussed in Chapter Three, hope sustains activism by enabling individuals to imagine that change is possible. For Маки, hope is reinforced through the Touch Grass Club community that affirms their vision of a better future. These gatherings transform hope from an aspiration into a collective experience reinforcing Маки’s belief that progressive change can be achieved. In this way, moral community sustains activism not only by providing emotional support, but by keeping open the possibility of a better future.

While Маки had already described Touch Grass Club as emerging out of a “need for community engagement”, I had noted in my research journal that I wanted to come back to

discuss community more, likely shaping the depth and duration of their reflection on its sustaining ability. This moment illustrates that themes are not simply discovered in interviews but are co-produced through the questions asked and the emphases placed on specific discussions by the researcher. Community may indeed be central to Mack's activism but my attentiveness to it and my own investment in understanding the role of community in sustaining activism likely structured how it was articulated in our discussion. This is not unique to this discussion, but holds true throughout this thesis as themes emerged not only from participants' words but through the co-construction of knowledge informed by my analytical interests.

Rebecca also highlights how community sustains activism, particularly in the face of intense hostility and emotional strain:

So I think taking breaks is important but also surrounding yourself with community. I think that has been really powerful. Even in doing the [far-right] research that I do, especially in the activism research that I did, people trauma dumped in interviews and you saw how bad it was out there but then you also saw the amazing efforts that people were putting forward. Even in the face of violent hate crimes they are still organizing this tiny Pride Society in small, rural Alberta. So knowing that there are such amazing people out there doing good work and creating community so that the support network is there for others to do good work is really powerful and keeps everyone going, I think.

Rebecca's experience reinforces how morally committed communities provide the emotional resilience and support networks necessary for activist to sustain their work. This form of collective identity is created through witnessing others' commitment to "doing good work" which, in turn, reinforces Rebecca's commitment to her own activist work. Witnessing specific acts of resilience such as the organization of a "tiny Pride Society in rural Alberta" in spite of "violent hate crimes" functions as a relational anchor that further sustains her activism. Further, observing these efforts creates a sense of hope for Rebecca as seeing that resistance continues despite adversity sustains her ability to imagine a future shaped by justice.

Moral community functions not only as a source of emotional resilience and support, but as a generator of hope which sustains activism. Through shared action and mutual support, these communities make the possibility of change feel real and attainable. This collective hope reinforces activists' commitment to their work even in the face of uncertainty and adversity. In this way, hope and moral community reinforce each other: community generates hope while hope sustains continued participation.

Although collective identity is formed out of demographic sameness for Katie as she advocates for a cause that impacts her directly (queer rights), it is also chosen based on moral and ethical reasoning. This emphasizes that collective identity created through demographic sameness and moral claims are not mutually exclusive, but can both be true simultaneously. While Katie's activism has been supported through the community created through her work with the Campus Collective Centre, she also acknowledges the importance of community in all its forms, not just those built out of demographic sameness:

Finding community, finding solidarity and people who will stand shoulder to shoulder with you, whatever that looks like is now more important than ever. And even if they're not people who show up to the rallies and do the work, if they're just people that care and are willing to listen and support and be there when you need them, that is still invaluable.

While the queer community provides Katie with a shared sense of belonging, her account emphasizes that community solidarity is not limited to identity-based connection. Instead, Katie emphasizes the importance of community, "whatever that looks like", extending community beyond demographic sameness.

Katie's account highlights the importance of solidarity formed through a shared commitment to dismantling systems of power that perpetuate harm. Katie's suggestion that "finding solidarity and people who will stand shoulder to shoulder with you" reflects collective responsibility rather than obligation due to identity. Even those who may not be directly involved

in obvious forms of activism (e.g. protests and rallies) but are “willing to listen and support and be there when you need them” are part of a broader community that helps sustain activist efforts. Further, Katie’s assertion that “none of us are free until we’re all free” combats the individualism and resulting isolation that capitalist systems of power create. Rather than viewing a social problem as an individual moral failing, Katie emphasizes the need to look at the system as the problem, not the people suffering under it. This can be understood through Spade’s emphasis on mutual aid — collectively organizing to meet each other’s needs — and collective care as practices that sustain activism.

Community also provides what Patricia Hill Collins (1989) distinguishes as wisdom — knowledge rooted in lived experience rather than book learning. Collins explains that wisdom is gained through navigating oppression and developing strategies for resistance and survival. Wisdom is evidently something that many participants in this study possess as they have experienced the forms of oppression they are fighting against. For example, Rebecca’s account of “seeing how bad it was out there” and witnessing “the amazing efforts that people were putting forward” reflects wisdom produced through direct lived experiences of harm and resistance. Similarly, Мак also points to the importance of wisdom for Touch Grass Club as a space for “sharing information and resources”. Here, wisdom emerges relationally through people learning from one another’s experiences and insights.

Katie speaks to wisdom specifically when discussing the importance of knowledge within both Q Space and The CCC: “Having people who can come into the organization and bring skills with them is important, but also retaining legacy members who have that long-term knowledge is also important.” Here, Katie is not only speaking to the knowledge of how these spaces operate, but the wisdom of those who have navigated systems of harm over longer periods of time.

Legacy members carry experiential understandings of what strategies work, how institutions respond, and how to care for one another in moments of crisis. This wisdom is passed through community networks, making it an important resource for sustaining activism across generations. In this way, community sustains activism not only through moral commitment, but through the shared wisdom that emerges from lived experience.

While wisdom exemplifies how communities are sustained from within, Azi and B discuss how support from the larger community helps sustain the organizations they are involved with. The moral commitment that creates collective action allows people to see themselves as part of a community that they want to contribute to helping. For Azi and B, this moral commitment is based in seeing the injustices faced by unhoused individuals and wanting to help. For those in the greater communities of Wetaskiwin and Lethbridge that share this moral and ethical belief, they are motivated to help through monetary or material donations, free labour, and other necessary resource required by the organization. B states that for Sage Clan, “community is our main resource” and goes on to explain further:

We’ve got the main roots of the tree, there’s 30 branches of that, but then if you look at the mycorrhiza that help spread it throughout the community. Who’s listening, who’s got water, who’s got socks. We have some old folks that just spend all year knitting mittens and then donating them and I’ve never seen these people, but I have 30 mittens to hand out when the first snow comes. So maybe we have 30 faces that I can recognize as volunteers, but maybe we have it in the hundreds. I have no idea how many people. The volume of goodwill that comes into Sage Clan, it’s not just 30 people, it’s way beyond that.

The unhoused community is thus an extension of the greater community’s shared moral commitment which they feel responsible for sustaining. The goodwill and good faith that B describes are forms of solidarity in action: community members support Sage Clan because they view its work as morally linked to their own values.

To understand this, I turn to Montgomery and bergman (2017) who emphasize that community care in the form of community resource sharing is often necessary as institutions, such as municipal governments, fail to offer the solutions and supports needed. B speaks to this specifically as he acknowledges, “our resources are really limited but, in a way, having to rely on the community rather than government funding and grants and what-not has been our strength in the past.” In Lethbridge, this lack of municipal support is evident with the number of unhoused individuals increasing by seven percent each year between 2022 and 2024 (Opinko, 2025a). In December 2025, Lethbridge city council voted to shut down the overdose prevention site regardless of the statistical evidence that it has been effective in reducing fatal overdoses by 80 percent from 2023 to 2024 (Opinko, 2025b). Thus, community donations and support becomes a form of mutual aid— community-based practices of support— in the absence of government support. Azi echoes this sentiment when discussing her involvement with Rock Soup, a food bank in Wetaskiwin that supports community members in need. She states that, “what sustains Rock Soup mostly is the community. The community really comes together either through donations from the community or people from the community coming and spending time at Rock Soup.” Much like Lethbridge, Wetaskiwin’s support for the unhoused is also limited, with their first permanent homeless shelter originally set to open in November 2025 (Mertz, 2024 & Max, 2025), after numerous delays, but more recently projected to open later in the winter of 2026 (Huncar, 2026).

This, again, shows how community support is an essential resource for Rock Soup, as the municipal government is not providing the resources that the unhoused community so desperately needs. These municipal failures are not merely local oversights but are also reflected in the provincial government’s approach to addressing homelessness where addiction and

homelessness are no longer governed through a harm reduction approach but a recovery-focused model that prioritizes treatment. The provincial government has shut down supervised consumption sites across the province, notably in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer, and replaced them with recovery-focused treatment services (Patterson, 2025; MacGillivray, 2025). These closures remove life-saving harm reduction infrastructure and force unhoused individuals to rely more heavily on community organizations, such as Sage Clan and Rock Soup. The Alberta government's housing and homelessness strategies are also falling short of the needs of the unhoused as they rely on gradual expansion and partnering with community agencies, rather than immediately and directly providing housing and services (Government of Alberta, n.d.-c). Mutual aid initiatives like Rock Soup and Sage Clan therefore did not simply emerge as acts of charity, but as necessary responses to provincial government strategy that selectively distribute care, shaping whose lives are protected and whose are left at risk.

4.3.2 Relationships

Rather than being supported through the solidarity of a community, Emily is sustained through individual relationships with those she is advocating for. As Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue, collective identities are not only formed through communities; they are also produced through emotional connections such as those produced through relationships that link individuals to the people they seek to help (p. 285). Emily explains that her work on education reform is not sustained through community like her environmental justice work. She explains that, "it's not sustained in the same way [as my environmental work] because I don't have that same community at the school or education system." Rather than being supported through community, Emily's education reform work is supported through her relationship with her son which she explains as follows:

One thing that is there is that my son is a part of the system. He is struggling in the current system as it is and it's not the fault of his teachers or the admin, it's the fault of the system itself. The current investment in the revitalization of our education programs and offers for students, you know? So that I think is one [sustaining factor] in a sense.

Emily's relationship with her son becomes a sustaining and motivating force that fills the gap of community in her efforts to create education reform. As discussed earlier, love operates as a sustaining force that moves activists into action. In Emily's case, this force is grounded in maternal love; an intimate relationship that becomes politically generative. Emily's relationship with her son thus functions as a relational basis for solidarity as it also pushes her to advocate for all students:

I am seeing the pain that this system causes in so many kids, that pain and despair, that apathy fuels me to do better because these kids deserve more, you know? Because that's huge for me— serving other people.

In this case, rather than community being formed out of a moral claim, Emily's relationship with her son gives her moral motivation. Love bridges the personal and the political, binding activists to those they seek to protect. Emily's love for her son informs the systemic harm she witnesses intolerable and transforms personal attachment into political obligation. Emily engages with this cause based on an ethical and moral commitment that she has built through her relationship with her son and witnessing how the system impacts his life. Specifically, Emily sees her son struggling in the education system as it currently is and blames this on the system itself, not the teachers or administration. Montgomery and Bergman (2017) emphasize that witnessing harm firsthand creates a sense of moral clarity which, in turn, can sustain activism. Emily's relationship with her son can be understood in this way as it allows for an intimate relational grounding based in love that helps her stay committed to education reform, regardless of whether she is involved with a larger activist community or not. This, in turn, pushes her to advocate for

all those impacted, regardless of her personal stakes, as she recognizes that “kids deserve more” and that serving other people is important to her.

Marko’s relationship with his queer friends functions in much the same way. Although Marko is not a member of the queer community, many of his friends are. As he explains, witnessing the injustices that they face motivates and sustains his activism:

The LGBTQ community is where I dedicate most of my efforts and that’s primarily because that’s where a lot of my social ties are. These are people who are immediately near and dear and important to me, so it makes it easy to be like, “How dare you come at my friend. You better be ready to go through me first.”

Much like Emily, Marko receives moral clarity through witnessing the harm done to his queer friends and the love he feels for them, as discussed in Chapter Three. This sustains his activism as witnessing the wrongdoing creates an intimate relational connection that pushes him to fight for his friends’ rights.

Much like how Emily’s relationship with her son provides an inside look at Alberta’s school system and Marko’s relationship with his queer friends provides an inside look at the mistreatment of the LGBTQ+ community, B’s relationships with homeless individuals in Lethbridge through his work with Sage Clan provides a window into their experiences of injustice and sustains his efforts to help them. He explains as follows:

What keeps me coming back to Sage Clan is that I’ve build a lot of close relationships to a lot of the people on the street, especially some of the older women I’ve gotten close to and some of the older individuals on the street as well. So, when I get to go out there and I get to, how do I put this, if they’re having a bad day, I get to be there to comfort them, if they’re having a good day, I get to be there to celebrate with them.

These relationships with homeless individuals and B’s ability to be there and personally comfort and celebrate with them sustains his efforts. Rather than discussing how the community of individuals involved in his organization sustain him, he focuses on the relationships he has with those he is trying to help. Montgomery’s and bergman’s (2017) theorization of relational labour,

the often-invisible work spent on building and maintaining connections and mutual understanding, is important to this analysis. The authors argue that relational work is foundational to thriving movements, as it builds trust and the shared capacity needed to resist isolation. Being present with people in their pain and their joy is itself a sustaining political practice. B's willingness to both be there for homeless individuals on their good and bad days reflects this form of relational activism which sustain him emotionally and morally. B further explains that these relationships are personal and important to him:

Like I have personal relationships with many of them so when I go out, I'm looking for this person, checking on this person. If they go away for a while I'm checking the newspapers for an obituary. I don't see an obituary so then they're either in jail or in treatment and then I'm chillin'.

Like Emily's relationship with her son, B's relationships with homeless persons are deeply personal, sustaining his moral motivation, creating a connection based in the moral claim that what these homeless people are enduring is unjust and needs to be addressed. In Poletta and Jasper's (2001) terms, these relationships are formed from a relational collective identity grounded in emotional connection and shared moral understandings of injustice, producing a sense of purpose and responsibility as a formal activist community.

These relationships also sustain B's activism by cultivating empathy. As discussed previously, empathy involves the capacity to "suffer with" others, requiring individuals to imagine another's experience of injustice. B's description of comforting unhoused people on their bad days and celebrating them on their good days illustrates how empathy is cultivated through relationships. B's activism is not driven solely by moral principles, but by emotional attachments formed through his personal relationships with members of the unhoused community. These relationships frame injustice as an immediate and emotionally meaningful reality, reinforcing his commitment to his activism. Importantly, these relationships also create

hope, a grounded sense of possibility rooted in personal relationships. As previously discussed, hope sustains activism by keeping open the possibility of change. For B, hope emerges through witnessing small but meaningful moments of care and connection that emphasizes that his presence makes a difference. In this way, empathy and hope work together to sustain B's activism.

Personal relationships outside of activism are also important to sustaining interviewees' as they allow them to take a step away from their activist work in order to recharge. As Emily and Маки illustrate, community can sustain activists by offering support and a sense of fulfillment. For those who are not a part of larger activist communities, this sustainment is achieved through both human and non-human relationships. For Dayn, their romantic partner, Logan, and their parents are essential to their sustainment as they offer support. When asked how they overcome overwhelm and burnout, Dayn responded as follows:

Yeah so I think definitely having a really good support system helps a lot. Like I said I have Logan who has been nothing but supportive, my parents who have come a long way and they are ridiculously supportive of everything.

As Dayn is not part of a larger group of activists, like Emily with her environmental NGO or Katie and her large network of LGTBQ+ rights activist, these personal relationships help sustain Dayn when they need it most.

Francine also speaks to a lack of community in her student advocacy work in university. She explains as follows:

Yes, I'm in the [students union], yes, I volunteer for these different clubs, and yes, I do x, y, and z, but I still feel like there's a lack of community and I don't know whether that's a me thing or a university thing. A lot of people still don't really find their [people] and it's an issue because I truly believe you cannot do this work alone.

Although Francine acknowledges she feels a lack of community, she goes on to highlight how she fills this gap with relationships outside of activism; specifically, her relationship with Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ is literally my best friend—he’s everything in one. When there were times when I had no one else to speak to, I would speak to him and the entire world can be against you and not understand you, but he did. And that comes a lot from reading his word, reading the Bible.

Francine’s relationship with Jesus Christ, much like Dayn’s relationship with her parents and Logan, sustains her activist efforts as she believes “you cannot do this work alone.” In the absence of community on campus, Francine finds support through the Bible and “his word”.

Francine is the only participant who brought up religious faith. As previously discussed, I identify as agnostic and have little knowledge of how Christianity can inform someone’s life. For this reason, I felt it important to include her discussion of Jesus Christ so as not to discount it based on my own worldviews. I am therefore conscious that while I do not belief in Jesus Christ, Francine’s worldview frames her relationship as real and relational. I have therefore leaned on the work of Catherine A. Faver (2000) to assist in my analysis of Francine’s relationship with Jesus Christ as she articulates it: as reciprocal, sustaining, and an active part of her daily life.

Through interviews with fifty episcopal laywomen in the Southeast United States, Faver explored the relationship between spirituality and activism. The women interviewed were not only involved in social justice through their churches, but also their larger communities and social service agencies as employees and/or volunteers (p. 67). Although Faver recognizes the limitations of using this study to generalize about Christian women, she also contends that the interview data could provide insights for women of different denominations as some participants were formerly involved in other forms of Christianity (p. 66). For this reason, this study offers

important insights that can be applied to Francine's relationship with Jesus Christ and how it sustains her activist efforts.

One of Faver's key findings is that episcopal women's activism is sustained through their relationships with God. Interview participants spoke to their relationship with God in much the same way as Francine discusses her relationship with Jesus Christ. Faver describes this as seeing "the holy in the ordinary" explain how this helps the respondents not feel isolated or alone in their activism (p. 70). The participants' sense of a personal relationship with God reduced feelings of isolation, as they understand God to be actively present in their daily lives. This perceived relationship allowed the women to feel supported in the absence of human support networks, much like Francine's feeling of a lack of campus community support. Francine frames Jesus Christ as someone she can always talk to, demonstrating how spirituality can function as a relationship that offers support when activist communities are missing.

While Francine finds community through her relationship with God, Sam further highlights how community can be different for everyone. Much like Emily and her education reform work, Sam's activist work is primarily done individually, rather than as part of a collective. As Polletta and Jasper (2001) note, collective identities are not always based in demographic sameness; they can also form out of moral commitment or relationships that connect the individual to a cause. Sam's individualized participation by financially supporting their friend in Palestine therefore still exemplifies a meaningful form of collective identification. Rather than being a part of a community whose collective identity is based in demographic sameness or a moral claim, Sam has a personal relationship with a Palestinian man in Gaza. Like Emily's relationship with her son that provides an inside look at the poor education system, this relationship provides an inside look at the injustices that Palestinians are enduring. What is

interesting here is that Sam did not mention this as a relationship that she finds sustaining.

Rather, when discussing community and relationships, Sam brought up their job as a therapist and explained that this is where they find community:

If I know that community is the sustaining force and how we succeed— it's both an activist strategy and a self-care strategy— how do I do that for myself knowing that adding more socializing on usually is actually pretty draining for me? So, in some ways my clients are my community, and I have to be cautious with that because I don't have a friendship relationship with them; they're not supporting me. I guess I can see other people doing the work and that's reflected back as part of community from working with my clients, which is pretty sustaining.

Here Sam explains that witnessing their clients “do the work”, referring to therapy, creates community for Sam as being able to see how they have helped them makes Sam feel a part of community. Following Polletta and Jasper (2001), Sam's therapeutic work shows how collective identity is built around shared practice rather than shared political identity. Witnessing their client's “do the work” makes Sam feel connected to a community based in mutual transformation.

These examples suggest that activist communities can come in many different forms. Personal relationships can function as a kind of micro-community when compared to larger communities of activists. Further, non-human relationships can also create community, as Sam explains:

If community can be non-human, I think nature is a really important piece of community for me. I think that it's fairly co-regulating. I think that going and hanging out with the trees and the mountains and the water and so on is in a weird way where I get some of that community feeling.

As previously discussed, Sam does not participate in large community activism, as their activist efforts are largely executed through financially supporting their friend in Palestine and their employment as a therapist. As such, Sam finds community in other ways, such as through nature. Sam also explains that because their job is so socially demanding, “adding more socializing on

usually is actually pretty draining for me.” Finding community in more conventional ways would thus have the opposite effect for Sam, causing their battery to further deplete rather than recharge. Finding this sense of community and its associated sustaining energy through nature is thus an alternative that allows Sam to “co-regulate” in times of overwhelm and burnout.

This section has shown that community and relationships are essential resources for sustaining activism. Whether formed through demographic sameness or moral commitment, community helps activists understand their participation as part of a collective struggle, which sustains their efforts over time. Communities and relationships provide emotional and practical support during moments of personal burnout while also compensating for institutional shortcomings when systems such as government fail to support those in need. In doing so, community operates not only as a source of solidarity, but as a sustaining force that enables activists to persist.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has highlighted how the interviewees’ activist efforts are sustained through the constant negotiation of resources alongside the demands of everyday life rather than being driven solely by moral or ethical commitment. This availability is determined not only by what resources are needed for subsistence, but how resources are produced and distributed within unequal systems of power. By centering the interviewees’ experiences, this chapter illustrated how resource mobilization is shaped and informed by privilege as a relational resource that can provide protection, credibility, and access to material resources. Community and relationships also emerged through interview discussions as necessary to sustaining activism, whether formed through shared identity, moral commitments, or personal connections to loved ones, religious figures, or nature. As such, they provide the emotional support, solidarity, and motivation needed

to enable activists to continue their work. When institutional support is lacking, community also creates networks of mutual aid that redistribute care and material resources where they are most needed. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that sustainment is not an individual achievement, but is a relational and structural process shaped by the availability of resources, the advantages received through systems of power, and the supports offered through the solidarity of community and relationships.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Over the past two and a half years, this research project evolved in ways I could not have anticipated. This project was originally inspired by the question of how empathy translates into action for activists. As I started my courses and literature review, it became clear that this question was limited and shaped by my pre-conceived notions about the role of empathy in activism. Recognizing this, I expanded my research question to consider more broadly how emotions and resources are involved in sustaining youth activism in Alberta. This shift allowed for interviews that did not presume to know which emotions or resources mattered most to sustaining activism. Instead, participants were able to articulate the emotions and resources that shaped their continued engagement.

The broader political context in Alberta over the past two and a half years has further shaped the urgency and significance of this work. Narratives of Alberta's presumed ultra-conservatism have intensified, amplified by the separatist movement's rhetoric and political messaging supported by Premier Danielle Smith. These narratives have grown alongside political unrest in the United States, which often informs the politics in this province. In this political climate, it has felt increasingly important to document and amplify the voices of young people who oppose the increased conservatism and authoritarianism in Alberta. While the Alberta government assumes all Albertans are in favour of their far-right ideologies, such as ultimately leaving Canada, this research challenges that narrative. The activists who shared their experiences with me make it clear that Alberta is politically and socially diverse, and that many young people are deeply committed to progressive change.

The findings of this research highlight the role of both emotions and resources in sustaining activism. While sadness provides the emotional awareness of wrongdoing, anger

provides the motivation to transform this recognition of injustice into action. Hope further sustains activist efforts by providing a vision of a better future that activists can strive for. Finally, love and empathy connect activists to their cause(s), supporting the action-oriented drive of anger. While emotions provide motivation and guidance, resources determine when and how activist work can take place. The negotiation of resources alongside the demands of subsistence provides further sustainment to activists alongside moral and ethical commitment. The availability of resources is also determined by how resources are produced and distributed within unequal systems of power. Resource mobilization is therefore shaped by privilege as a relational resource that can be mobilized to offer solidarity and protection. Community and relationships are also important to sustaining activism as they provide the mutual care and solidarity that a social process like sustaining activism requires.

Conducting this research has profoundly shaped my understanding of knowledge production and my role within it. I have become more aware of the ways that I, as a researcher, influence both the research process and its outcomes. Themes did not simply emerge from the data but were co-created through dialogue, shaped by my questions, my responses, and the interpretive lenses I brought to the analysis. Further, participants' accounts were influenced by when and how I asked for elaboration based on my own interests, even if unknowingly, which also influenced how I interpreted and organized their words in this thesis. This was particularly evident with Маки's discussion of community, which I explored more specifically in chapter Four. Over time, I grew increasingly aware of how even subtle interjections— my “mhm,” “right,” or nodding in agreement— were part of the process through which meaning is co-constructed. While these responses were often expressions of agreement and understanding, I recognized how they may have shaped the direction of our conversations. This awareness led me

to approach subsequent interviews with greater reflexivity. As a result, I became more mindful in subsequent interviews, working to balance rapport with creating space for participants to guide the conversation's direction.

Undertaking this research also required confronting my personal doubts about my abilities. Imposter syndrome manifested as doubt about my right and ability to conduct this research. I questioned whether I could meaningfully connect with participants whose activism often involved risks and forms of engagement that I could not relate to. I wondered if I was the right person to study these issues given the privileges I hold and the fact that I am not directly impacted by most of the injustices discussed. Over time, I came to understand that research does not require that the researcher relate directly to the participants experience, but rather that I practice careful listening, and reflexivity. Trusting my interpretations meant continually reflecting on my positionality and recognizing that research of this nature is always co-creating knowledge. This reflexive practice became central not only to this project but to my overall growth as a scholar and researcher.

I was also unprepared for the emotional labour this research would demand. Initially, I believed I could complete the interviews in a couple of weeks. Instead, I found that these conversations required more care and recovery time than I had anticipated. Listening to participants describe the ways systems of power shaped their experiences of marginalization and exhaustion was often as draining as it was inspiring. Conducting meaningful, purposeful, and attentive discourse analysis also required that I slow down. After completing my first few transcripts, it became evident to me that I was not reflecting on the words as I transcribed but rather, I was just trying to get it done in a timely manner. Although I did reflect back on the transcripts many times throughout this process, I found that when I slowed down during

transcribing, I was able to consider the participants words more mindfully and develop more robust themes.

I acknowledge the limitations of this study as no research can be all encompassing. Although I am grateful for the openness and insights of the activists who participated, their experiences are not representative of all youth activists in Alberta. The majority of participants were white, middle- or upper-class, had post-secondary educations, and were able-bodied. As such, this research contributes to ongoing conversations about youth activism in the province but does not fully address the perspectives of BIPOC, low socioeconomic status, or disabled people. Future research would benefit from centering these voices more intentionally. Given Canada's colonial history, Indigenous voices should also be attended to more intentionally along with an approach that fully listens to and respects Indigenous ways of knowing. Additional studies might also include follow-up interviews to allow the participants to share anything they have thought of later as they continue with their activism. Interviewing individuals who have disengaged from activism would also be beneficial as it would offer the opportunity to consider their perspectives on what caused them to disengage and what could bring them back to engagement.

Ultimately, this thesis has become about more than identifying the emotions and resources that sustain youth activism in Alberta. It has been an exploration of how knowledge is produced in politically charged contexts, how I, as a researcher, am implicated in the stories they tell, and how young people continue to organize and imagine alternative futures despite narratives that can render their efforts invisible. While research on activism generally is abundant, research that considers the unique experiences of those aged 18 to 35 and what sustains them is limited. Research on this age demographic within this specific moment in history in Alberta is also yet to be explored. By focusing on youth ages 18 to 35 in Alberta, I

hope that my research can contribute to filling these gaps and potentially help support future research on what sustains youth activism in other regions experiencing increased prevalence of conservatism and authoritarianism. In a province often characterized by an all-encompassing ideological lens, this research affirms the presence and persistence of youth activists who refuse conservative ideology. By documenting their experiences, I hope this work not only challenges assumptions about Alberta's political identity but also contributes to sustaining the very activism it seeks to understand, in however small a way.

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APPENDIX A: Consent Form



School of Graduate Studies
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403-329-5194
sgs@uleth.ca

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Beyond Opposition: Examining How Progressive Youth Social Movements are Sustained

Contact Information

Principal Investigator:	Megan Dobbie, MA student, Sociology
Mailing Address:	School of Graduate Studies, University of Lethbridge Lethbridge, AB T1K 3M4
Email:	me.dobbie@uleth.ca
Supervisor:	Dr. Suzanne Lenon
Mailing Address:	University of Lethbridge Lethbridge, AB T1K 3M4
Phone:	403-380-1876
Email:	suzanne.lenon@uleth.ca

You are invited to take part in my Master's research project. Before we begin, we will review this consent form together and you are free to ask any questions. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research?

You are being invited to participate in this study because of your involvement as a youth activist in a progressive social movement in Alberta.

What is the reason for doing the study?

This study aims to gain a better understanding of what sustains activism for young people (ages 18-35) involved in progressive social movements in Alberta as the far-right continues to grow in strength.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute in-person OR virtual interview. This interview will be a conversation with myself, Megan, about your activist work. In

this interview, you will be asked general questions about your activist work, what sustains said work, and questions to help me identify opposing movements for further analysis. Virtual interviews will take place over Zoom in which you can choose if they would like to keep your camera turned on or off. In-person interviews will take place in a location mutually agreed upon by the both of us.

The interviews will be recorded (audio for in-person, video and audio for virtual) and I will transcribe the interview word-for-word. All data will be stored on a password-protected laptop in an encrypted folder. The transcription will use pseudonyms for you and any identifying information for any organizations you may be involved with if you have indicated that you do not want your real name to be used.

What are the risks and discomforts?

This study will draw on your connection to activist movements. As many people have been directly impacted by the causes they advocate for, there is a possibility that the conversation could bring up experiences that are psychologically or emotionally difficult. Discussion of barriers to understanding between far-right and progressive movements has the potential for distressing conversations as well. If at any time you wish to not answer a question, change the subject, or end the interview, that decision will be respected. I have also provided some available resources if you feel you require additional support in processing these emotions.

Canadian Mental Health Association: 1-866-531-2600
Mental Health Helpline (Alberta): 1-877-303-2642

Pseudonyms for both you and any organizations you are associated with will be used to safeguard you as best as possible from this risk if you have indicated that you do not want your real name to be used.

The interviewer will follow-up with you one week post-interview to ensure that you do not require any additional resources and to see if you have questions, additional comments, or concerns.

It is not possible to know all of the risks that may happen in a study, but I have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to you.

What are the benefits to me?

While there may not be any direct benefits to you, findings from this Master's research project will contribute to knowledge about what sustains youth activism in Alberta and as such may be of benefit to others now and in the future.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Participating in this study is your choice. You can withdraw from the research up to 4 weeks after receiving your transcript/ After that point, we cannot remove you from the study because your data will have been fully analyzed. To withdraw from the study please contact Megan Dobbie (me.dobbie@uleth.ca) or her thesis supervisor Dr. Suzanne Lenon (Suzanne.lenon@uleth.ca).

At any point in the interview, if you ask me to stop recording, I will do so and only resume recording when I have your permission.

You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point in time. I will stop recording. I will ask your permission if the interview recorded to date may be used in the study. If you do not give permission for this, the interview will be deleted from the recording device.

Will my information be kept private?

During this study, I will do everything I can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or be published unless you give us your express permission. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so I cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, I will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private.

After the interview takes place, all digital data will be kept on a password-protected laptop in an encrypted folder. Any paper copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office. All cellphone recordings will be deleted from my personal device.

During research studies it is important that the data we get is accurate. For this reason, your data, including your name, may be looked at by people from the Research Ethics Board as well as my MA supervisor.

After the study is done, I will still need to securely store your data that was collected as part of the study. Your data will be securely stored electronically in encrypted files on a password-protected laptop. Physical data will remain secure in locked cabinets within

the locked office of the lead investigator. At the University of Lethbridge, we keep data stored for a minimum of 5 years after the end of the study.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact Megan Dobbie (me.dobbie@uleth.ca) or her supervisor Dr. Suzanne Lenon (suzanne.lenon@uleth.ca).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca or 780-492-2615 and quote Ethics ID Pro00XXXXXX. This office is independent of the study investigators.

How do I initiate my agreement to be in this study?

By signing below, you understand:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study
- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.
- That you agree to the data being stored as part of a data repository (where applicable)

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

I give permission for my real name to be used ☐ Yes ☐ No

Pseudonym: _____

Signature of Participant

Date



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SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Poster



The poster features a large, white, jagged-edged speech bubble with a black outline, set against a background with a vertical color gradient from purple at the top to green at the bottom. A yellow lightning bolt is positioned to the right of the speech bubble. Below the speech bubble, on the left, is a pink and purple megaphone. To the right of the megaphone, the contact information is displayed in bold black text. At the bottom of the poster, a small line of text provides ethical approval information.

Are you an 18-35 year old living in Alberta
who participates in social activism?

**YOU ARE
INVITED!**

*To participate in a 60-90 minute
interview discussing what
sustains youth activism*

**If interested
please contact
Megan Dobbie
me.dobbie@uleth.ca**

This research project has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (Ethics ID Pro00138556)

APPENDIX C: Letter Of Initial Contact (Organization)

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research project

DATE

Hello,

My name is Megan Dobbie and I am a Master's student in the Department of Sociology department at the University of Lethbridge. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Lenon.

I am writing to you today to invite you to share the attached poster to your constituencies as an invitation to participate in a study entitled "Beyond Opposition: How Progressive Youth Social Movements are Sustained". This study aims to uncover what sustains youth activism in a progressive social given the strength of far-right social movements. The research has received approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office (Ethics ID Pro00XXXX).

If you have any questions about the research and recruitment poster, please don't hesitate to contact me at me.dobbie@uleth.ca or my supervisor Dr. Suzanne Lenon (Suzanne.lenon@uleth.ca).

Thank you for your assistance in recruiting participants for this important research!

Sincerely,
Megan Dobbie

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF INVITATION (INDIVIDUAL)

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research project

DATE

Hello,

My name is Megan Dobbie and I am a Master's student in the Department of Sociology department at the University of Lethbridge. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Lenon.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled "Beyond Opposition: How Progressive Youth Social Movements are Sustained". This study aims to uncover what sustains youth activism in a progressive social movement given the strength of far-right social movements.

This interview will be 60 to 90 minutes long. It can take place in-person or over zoom. If in person, the location will be at a mutually determined location.

With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed, the audio-recording will be destroyed.

As many people have been directly impacted by the causes they advocate for, there is a possibility that the interview could bring up experiences that were psychologically or emotionally difficult or traumatic. As such, I will provide you with therapeutic resources. Care will be taken to protect your identity. Pseudonyms for both you and any organizations you are associated with will be used to safeguard you as best as possible from this risk if you have indicated that you do not want your real name to be used. You will have the right to not answer any questions asked and/or to withdraw from the interview at any time. You will receive your interview transcript for review at which point you can anonymize data even further or request that specific parts of the interview not be used in data analysis. You can also end your participating in the research up to 4 weeks after receiving the transcript. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed.

APPENDIX E: Social Media Script

1. DM of Initial Contact (Individual Activists)

Hello,

My name is Megan Dobbie and I am a Master's student in the Sociology department at the University of Lethbridge. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Lenon.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled "Beyond Opposition: How Progressive Youth Social Movements are Sustained". This study aims to uncover what sustains youth activism in a progressive social movement given the strength of far-right social movements.

This study involves a 60-90 minute interview that will take place in-person or over zoom. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed, the audio-recording will be destroyed.

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions about the research, please reply to this message or contact me at me.dobbie@uleth.ca.

2. DM to share recruitment poster (Organizations)

My name is Megan Dobbie and I am a Master's student in the Department of Sociology department at the University of Lethbridge. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Lenon.

I am writing to you today to invite you to share the attached poster to your constituencies as an invitation to participate in a study entitled "Beyond Opposition: How Progressive Youth Social Movements are Sustained". This study aims to uncover what sustains youth activism in a progressive social movement given the strength of far-right social movements.

The research has received approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office (Ethics ID Pro00XXXX).

If you have any questions about the research and recruitment poster, please don't hesitate to contact me at me.dobbie@uleth.ca or my supervisor Dr. Suzanne Lenon (suzanne.lenon@uleth.ca).

Thank you for your assistance in recruiting participants for this important research!

APPENDIX F: Interview Guide

Beyond Opposition: Examining How Progressive Youth Social Movements are Sustained in Alberta

First, thank participant for being here. I will introduce myself (for recording). I will let them know this is my MA thesis research on sustaining youth activism.

I will then review the consent form with the participant before they sign it.

In-person: The consent form will be signed once we have gone through it together.

Zoom: The consent form will be emailed to the participant prior to the interview. Verbal consent will be given on record after going over the consent form. At this time, the participant will also be given the option of using a pseudonym.

I will let the interviewee know that this is an interview in a series of interviews for my MA thesis and that their response will to the questions will inform my final Master's thesis. I will then explain the research again so that the interviewee knows what we are going to be talking about. I will ask them if they have any questions.

I will let them know that the interview is beginning and that I will be pressing record.

1. Can you tell me your name, pronouns, age, location, and any other biographical information you want me to know and that you think is relevant to this research?
2. What social movements are you part of? In what capacity?
 - a. How long?
 - b. How did you come to this work?
 - i. Can you tell me about the history of the movement/group you are involved with: When did it begin? What was the impetus?
 - c. What types of work do you do in the movement and/or organization/group?
 - i. Who is behind the scenes? Who cooks the meals, buys the materials, what other labour is involved?
 - ii. What resources are needed? (time, money, childcare, etc.)
3. What sustains you as an individual in terms of your activist work?
 - i. What fills your cup?
 - ii. What does 'sustain' mean to you?
 - iii. Who/what supports you?
 - iv. What do you need to avoid overload/burnout?
4. In the work that you do, do you consider yourself an activist?
 - a. If no: Why not? What word would you use to describe yourself in relation to your work?
 - b. If yes: what does activism mean to you? How would you define activism?

5. What kinds of adversity, challenges, and/or barriers do you or your organization face in your activism?
 - a. Who are you mobilizing for? Who are you mobilizing against?
 - b. How do these barriers make you feel? What emotions do they elicit and how might these impact how your work is sustained?
 - c. Listen for specific emotions and invite them to explain further with examples
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share about what sustains your activist work that I might have missed or that you think is relevant?
7. Do you have any questions for me?

Let them know that they will be receiving their interview transcript within four weeks to review.