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A comfortable rebellion: resistance, embodiment and space in the production of digital feminist art

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Abstract

This research explores the experiences of digital feminist artists in the production of digital feminist art. In doing this, I look at how digital feminist artists experience working within digital spaces and investigate the ways that digital feminist artists conceptualise their work in terms of its aesthetics and content. Working within a sociological feminist theoretical framework, influenced by postmodern feminist epistemology, this research uses a qualitative empirical approach. Through analysing unstructured online interviews with sixteen digital feminist artists who are women, this research makes three distinct theoretical contributions to the field of the sociology of art and feminist theory. Firstly, this research contributes to the construction of a specifically feminist sociology of art, expressing how digital spaces such as Instagram are central to this emerging field. Secondly, I develop a notion of resistance that speaks to contemporary experiences of the intersection of feminism and technology. Finally, I underscore the importance of embodiment to this understanding of resistance. This type of resistance is embodied, conscious, quiet, and embedded within digital feminist art practice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context

I began this research in late 2018. Earlier that year, I saw artist Molly Soda's third solo exhibition since 2015, *Me and My Gurls*, at Annka Kultys gallery in London. This particular exhibition turned the gallery walls into a walk-in computer desktop which included GIFs, an archive of YouTube comments, and screenshots of websites. Inviting her audience into her desktop space, the artist blurred the lines between our digital and material identities and realities. Similarly in a previous exhibition, *Comfort Zone* (2016), she explored contemporary everyday digital experiences such as instant messaging, retweeting, and liking posts through video loops playing on pink TVs. Her work speaks to endless image circulation generated from social media and explores the entanglement with public and private identities particularly for young women.

With lots of focus on confessional video loops created in her childhood bedroom in most of her work, she fulfils the cliched hyper-femininity of camgirl imagery whilst simultaneously disrupting it through typically non-feminine performances of the body such as growing body hair and drawing attention to menstruation. Proulx (2016, 116) notes how Soda's work extends the work of her feminist forebearers who were concerned with performing their bodies in critique of mainstream representations of women's bodies, but Soda provides a 'relentless, linked-in imagery of herself that does not quite sit right – does not pass for normative or conventional'. This focus on how women's bodies are experienced in digital cultures provides the grounding for her work to be read as examining the technological mediation of contemporary online feminisms. More specifically, Molly Soda has been described as a selfie feminist (Dean, 2016). Whilst sometimes a derogatory term to describe the assumed frivolousness of women's experiences of contemporary digital cultures as shallow and individually serving (Freeman, 2016), selfie feminism or selfie feminists can also describe the social phenomenon of an internet-generation of women engaged in producing art that explores technologically mediated experiences of gender. It is this phenomenon that this research seeks to explore.

My interest in Soda's work originated from my women's studies MA, where I was introduced to lots of feminist art in a feminist cultural activism module. Although I have had a longstanding interest in art, particularly art made by women, it was during my master's degree that I developed a deeper awareness of the relationship between feminism and art and began to

understand the politics and the activism inherent to both the production of art and the work itself. In this module I also learnt of how technologies pose possibilities and challenges for women in constructing a feminist visual culture and wanted to explore the relationship between women and technology in contemporary contexts further. In seeing her work for the first time, years after graduating from my MA, I was struck by the ways in which Soda's art speaks to contemporary experiences of womanhood whilst also being so reminiscent of earlier feminist art more usually associated with the feminist art movement (see Brodsky and Olin, 2008) which I had studied previously.

Whilst not labelled explicitly as feminist work, Soda's art explores themes such as women's subjective experiences, expressing sexual politics, and utilising the body as subject, which are all central to the feminist art movement of the 1970s. The difference is that Soda's work is not necessarily happening in conjunction with a broader social movement in the way that the feminist art movement happened alongside the women's movement (Fields, 2012) and is therefore not read as overtly feminist in its approach. Instead, her work is attributed to a technological wave in which feminism increasingly becomes a digital aesthetic and perhaps less of a political ideal (Crepax, 2020). What this research seeks to explore is how feminisms do matter to women who produce art within a digital framework and outside of a broader social movement. Whilst my research here does not provide a reading of Molly Soda's work, it does contribute to an understanding of a specific way of working in which she is situated. The intersection of feminism, art, and technology is where digital feminist artists exist, and conceptualising their experiences is essential in constructing an understanding of that very intersection, and how it matters to their gendered identities.

An intersection between art and technology is becoming increasingly visible within the more traditional art world. For example, the Annka Kultys gallery, where Soda was represented from 2015 to 2021, has become a leading platform for emerging digital artists since its opening in 2015. Concerned with this intersection of digital technologies and art, the gallery hosts an online platform dedicated to showing digital art and NFTs (non-fungible tokens) and was the first gallery in the world to represent an artist who is a robot. More mainstream art institutions have also embraced the digital recently, particularly through COVID-19, where major art fairs such as Art Basel and Frieze Art produced digital galleries and digital exhibitions. Moreover, in 2021 Christies sold its first NFT, Beeple's (2007 – 2021) *Everydays: The First 5000 Days*, for $69 million and has since invested into giving platforms to newer digital artists (Chow, 2021). This emergence happened as my research was ongoing, and whilst my research does

not speak directly to the ways in which art institutions are responding to digital art, it is helpful in noting the timeliness and urgency of this research, as well as demonstrating the cultural context of which this research sits. Although more well-known digital artists who are women such as Molly Soda, Arvida Byström, or Petra Collins are recognised as artists and are visible as part of this contemporary digital art landscape, the majority of artists represented in these new digital spaces are established, white, and male (Gerlieb, 2021). Therefore, this emerging landscape arguably continues to reproduce gendered divisions.

My research as detailed within this thesis highlights the feminism central to this intersection by exploring the emerging phenomenon of digital feminist art. In recognising the importance of technology to digital feminist artists' everyday experiences, this research develops an account of how gender matters to artists embedded within this cultural sphere and demonstrates how feminist politics continue to underpin the production of women's art within this contemporary digital context.

Whilst this rise in popularity of using digital technology as a medium to create art is usually attributed to the conceptual art movement, Brodsky (2022) offers another link, the feminist art movement. Digital artists whose practices are entwined with feminist theory and politics have been influential in shaping visual culture and has challenged the masculinism associated with technology (Brodsky, 2022). In considering the context of the relationship between feminism, art, and technology in order to situate my own sample of digital feminist artists within a history of feminist art practice, it is important to recognise this relationship between the feminist art movement and the rise of digital technology because this is intrinsic to the practices of feminist digital artists, and has shaped feminist theorising and politics.

There is a longstanding history of feminist artists working with new media technologies, exploring the potential value of technology for feminist activism amid a backdrop of cyberfeminist thinking. Brodsky (2022, 1) highlights that between the 1960 and 1970s in particular, 'feminist artists both repurposed traditional art disciplines and sought out new art forms to express an aesthetic based on women's experience'. Feminist theorising therefore played a very important role in the development of digital art, and feminist digital art contributed to the development of feminist thinking and organising. Moreover, in documenting an emerging relationship between feminist artists and new media technologies, Flanagan and Looui (2007, 182) identify that the field of emerging feminist art activism is characterised by 'some single-authored politically engaged works of cyberart by women artists, as well as work

by collectives where women work from the inside of institutions and collective entities to contribute to a larger voice and to foster a broader sense of social equity and inclusion'. This following section will highlight some of these works, exploring the practices of feminist artists who have engaged with digital technologies in their work to navigate the complex relationship between digital technologies and feminist politics.

Early feminist art focusing on technology and the internet often did so in conversation with cyberfeminism, which intertwined feminist artists and theorists (Brodsky, 2022). Cyberfeminism is important throughout this thesis, particularly section 2.4 of the literature review and in chapter seven, but I will briefly outline it now as to provide further context and meaning to understanding feminist artist's relationship with technologies. Cyberfeminism as a theoretical perspective emerging in the 1990s has been used as a way to think about and investigate how technologies, and particularly internet and new media technologies, matter to gender (see Haraway, 1985, 1991; Plant, 1997). Cyberfeminism has also been a liberatory ideal for some feminist thinkers who understand technologies as being central to the breakdown of contemporary gender boundaries (Braidotti, 1996) and as a space of possibilities to address the complexities of social life created by technologies themselves (Wilding, 1998). Whilst questions surrounding the liberatory potential of cyberfeminism remain, it is important to acknowledge the importance of cyberfeminist ideas in the production of feminist art because they are central to feminist theorising surrounding digital technologies and so have a direct relationship to the art produced.

VNS Matrix, comprising of four Australian artists: Virginia Barratt, Francesca da Rimini, Julianne Pierce, and Josephine Starrs, was one of the earliest cyberfeminist collectives to name themselves as such. They worked with code to create art that embraced technology and the internet as a site of power for women. In being some of the first artists to attach the terms cyber and feminism together to signify a specific artistic identity, VNS Matrix used the language of technology and subverted it, recognising and challenging male dominated popular culture (Way, 2016). Da Rimini (1996) notes how the collective originally began with an interest in creating pornography for women, but quickly moved into focusing on how women were being represented through technologies as fetishized and cliched bodies rendered mostly invisible in wider popular culture. Beginning with their manifesto, *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* (1992), they highlighted women's bodies as a site of disruption towards patriarchal technology and techno-culture. Brodsky (2022) notes how VNS Matrix used the language of feminist theory and paired it with slang terminology surrounding women's anatomy to create

an explicit and aggressive depiction of women's sexuality in order to directly oppose the masculinism associated with technology. The manifesto is therefore about women's pleasure, with the critical aim to 'marginalise masculinity's hold on technology by delineating computing in and through the female body and female pleasure' (Way, 2016, 189).

Similar to NS Matrix but more intersectional in their approach (Brodsky, 2022), subRosa is a feminist art collective founded by Faith Wilding and Hyla Willia which was originally organised as a reading group to research and theorise feminist concerns such as technology and embodiment (Wilding and Willis, 2016). This collective of cyberfeminists worked with new media art since 1998 to explore many social and political issues through a feminist lens proposing to make visible the effects of the relationship between gender and technology. SubRosa's manifesto (1998) states that subRosa is a 'reproducible cyberfeminist cell of cultural researchers committed to combining art, activism, and politics to explore and critique the intersections of the new information and biotechnologies in women's bodies, lives, and work'. In line with this manifesto their art and activism always explores the intersections of the environment, biology, and political, social, and cultural systems (Brodsky, 2022).

In their first net art project entitled *SmartMom* (1999) subRosa members used a satirical feminist appraoch to examine and respond to new reproductive technologies such as IVF and surrogacy by creating a SmartMom website. In direct response to the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency's Smart T-shirt technology, subRosa proposed an adaptation of the Smart T-shirt aimed at civilian women to control and servile their pregnant bodies. One of the images in this project features military style Smart clothing which is work by a female torso. Way (2016) identifies how the straps on the T-shirt are evocative of surveillance technologies designed for the military. She also notes how in covering the breasts and stomach on the female torso, this work highlights the ways in which patriarchal social structures and institutions value women as only bodies with the potential to reproduce, that need to be controlled. In this way the net art project demonstrated how by repurposing technologies, it is possible to 'literally harness productive and reproductive female labor' (Wilding and Willis, 2016, 4). SubRosa's work then makes the links between women's experiences of their bodies and medical technologies, and their activism in this area challenges the necessity and the ethics of viewing women's bodies as sites of technological surveillance and control when it comes to reproduction. In doing this, their art demonstrates the broader politics of cyberfeminism.

As well as artist activist collectives, the context of digital feminist art is characterised by a wider effort towards community building and organising amongst cyberfeminists. With goals of organising cyberfeminists to work for creating a feminist environment on the net, the First Cyberfeminist International conference took place in Kassel, Germany, in 1997. Around thirty women participated, in response to an open invitation to attend on the FACES listserv, in eight days of discussions, work, and organising. The conference focused heavily on helping women to develop their careers, setting up mailing lists to ensure that women could stay connected and communicate with each other, and reshaping cyberfeminism into something more concerned with networking and education over the earlier confrontational work such as that from VNS Matrix (Brodsky, 2020). This mutation of cyberfeminism was born from new organisations such as the Old Boys Network (influential in organising the First Cyberfeminist International) disagreeing with the methods of VNS Matrix due to the controversy they caused with their confrontational style and taboo language (Brodsky, 2022). Reflecting on the conference experience, one of the founders Faith Wilding (1998) notes that 'the chief gains from the CI discussions were trust, friendship, a deeper understanding and tolerance of differences; the ability to sustain discussions about controversial and divisive issues without group rupture; and mutual education about issues of women immersed in technology, as well as a clearer understanding of the terrain for cyberfeminist intervention'. Networks like this remain important for feminist digital artists today. For example FACES is still an online community which seeks to connect women in media culture. Since its founding in 1997 to answer the question of where the women in technology are, it now has over 400 women who participate in a listserv to promote events, exhibitions, and publications relevant to women in media and technology (Brodsky, 2022).

Throughout this section I have contextualised earlier feminist digital art practices, and highlighted the deep-seated relationship between feminist thinking and digital technology. I have demonstrated here how feminist artists have challenged binary thinking and masculinism within technology and digital spaces, and how cyberfeminism continues to be central to how we can understand feminist digital art practices. In considering my research, this section offers an understanding of a legacy of feminist art practice that my sample of digital feminist artists are part of and think through in their work. My research contributes to this discussion by examining contemporary experiences of digital feminist artists, specifically thinking about how social media platforms such as Instagram can be conceptualised through this lens.

1.2 Research overview

This research explores the practices and experiences of digital feminist artists in their production of digital feminist art. Within this, I explore the experiences of working within digital spaces and specifically on digital platforms such as Instagram, as well as exploring the relationships that digital feminist artists have with the work that they produce in terms of its contents and aesthetics. Through online interviews with sixteen digital feminist artists, this research makes three main theoretical contributions to the field. Firstly, I contribute to the development of a specifically feminist sociology of art, demonstrating how digital spaces and especially Instagram are central to this emerging field. Secondly, I develop an account of resistance that is relevant to digital feminist visual cultures. This resistance is quiet, conscious, embedded within art practice, and happening alongside, but importantly outside of, broader feminist movements. Thirdly, I highlight the importance of embodiment to this type of resistance and contribute to cyberfeminist literature in exploring the relevance of traditional ideas within contemporary art contexts, outlining how embodiment is a negotiation of tensions. These contributions are important and valuable because they continue to develop debates within specific fields whilst also bringing together these disciplines in order to explore an emerging, contemporary art making practice and type of feminism that is happening across digital platforms. Ultimately this research brings about a way of conceptualising resistance as it relates to both art and feminism in digital spaces.

I frame this research broadly within feminist theory and the sociology of art, drawing on cyberfeminist literature to underscore the feminist politics inherent to the experience of working within digital spaces (see Haraway, 1985; Plant, 1997). Such a framing means that my research has its foundations within a sociological understanding of art production, which places art as a social process grounded in collective social action (Becker, 2008). A sociological underpinning also allows, as the literature review will demonstrate further, that art production be understood as a cultural phenomenon (Wolff, 1981). This framing will be important to this research as is ensures that the parameters are broad enough to explore the production of digital feminist art as both a social and cultural phenomenon, rather than conceptualising of this experience as an individualised, or essential practice.

Feminist theory is embedded within this sociological framework for the research and serves as a strong foundation from which to critically explore the gendered elements of the experiences of digital feminist artists. Feminist art history and criticism, along with feminist theories of aesthetics (see Nochlin, 1988; Parker and Pollock, 2013) are a useful and necessary grounding

for my research as they offer further clarity surrounding the binaries that structure both art spaces and gendered social and cultural life more broadly. The feminism that binds this research is necessary not only because it structures an underpinning for the topic of study, but also because it is central to the lives of the women involved in this research as participants, and is also central to the way in which the research itself has been conceived of and how it has been designed. The women involved are themselves embedded within academic and popular feminist discourses in their everyday lives as women, and in their professional lives as artists. It is therefore crucial that the approach to the research supports the critique of power within the production of digital feminist art, in the same way that digital feminist artists themselves are entwined within these critiques in their own lives.

This theoretical framework therefore also works to set the foundation for the ontological, epistemic, and methodological approach that I take within this research. Beginning from considerations of feminist ontology and epistemology, this research is necessarily empirical. I use qualitative methods in order to construct an account of the experiences of digital feminist artists to address the four central aims of the research. The aims are:

 1: to critically examine the role of digital technologies within women's art practice and participation

2: to identify ways in which women's digital art engages with feminisms to challenge political and cultural constructions of the body

3: to draw from feminist epistemologies to critique and challenge institutional notions of doing sociological research

4: to explore how women's digital art constructs and changes contemporary feminist activisms.

These aims have been developed through a reflexive, feminist approach to research and are the final iteration of four years of work. They stemmed initially from consultation with literature through identifying common important themes and some gaps in knowledge, and my continued engagement with literature throughout the analysis also informs the aims and scope of the research. The aims have also been developed through discussions with digital feminist artists in interviews. My reflexive approach allows for a continuous revision of aims and the ability for participants to have a more central position in terms of the research about their experiences poses a further challenge to traditional ways of working on research within an academic setting. I will discuss this desire for feminist disruption further in section 1.5 of this chapter. The aims

are therefore not fixed or linear in their development, rather they move with the research and speak to the fluidity of a feminist approach which is of central importance to the research. These aims also represent a specific moment in time in regards to feminism and digital art production, and it is this contemporary moment and this emerging intersection that these aims seek to explore.

Working in conversation with these aims is important because they frame the ways in which the outcomes of this research can contribute to knowledge more widely. Achieving these aims is important because it means that this research can make contributions to the sociology of art and feminist theory, whilst also making contributions to the development of a specifically feminist sociology of art. Specifically, as will be discussed in the following section, the outcomes of this research will contribute to thinking about a sociological approach to art and culture from a feminist position, and will also add to work within feminist thinking surrounding the role of art in women's experiences of digital cultures and embodiment.

Chapters three and four will detail the ontological, epistemic, and methodological approach much more thoroughly, but here it is important to introduce the methods that I use to address the aims of the project in order to demonstrate from the outset how this research happened and how the methodological approach in itself further contributes towards the central aims. Within this research I used unstructured online interviews with sixteen digital feminist artists. The interviews were all conducted over Skype or FaceTime and each lasted between one and three hours, and due to the geographical locations of the participants, the interviews took place at various times both during the day and evenings. Interviews were arranged and conducted across a six-month period in which I worked reflexively with participants, answering questions about the interview process, conducting the actual interviews, and reflecting on the transcripts with the participants. The interviews were each audio recorded and transcribed with the consent of participants, and then coded through a reflexive process of thematic analysis.

The choice to use unstructured interviews was conscious and specific to the aims of challenging traditional ways of doing social research, as they allow for much greater freedom and reflexivity within the interview process as well as the analysis. Deciding to conduct online interviews was both a theoretical and functional choice. It was important to me, as a researcher, that the ways in which data were gathered was authentic as possible to the topics in which we were exploring. Being feminist artists who worked in digital ways, it felt only appropriate to experience digital space in our communications. At the same time, working on this research

through COVID-19 meant that practical restrictions over the interview process were also at the forefront of decision making. Whilst I had decided to use online interviews prior to the pandemic, the choice proved appropriate in the face of global restrictions and the continued safety of everyone involved in the research process. Moreover, the women who participated in my research through interviews are located across the world which meant that it would have been financially and practically difficult to navigate in person interviews.

Within this research I have defined digital feminist artists, as will be explored in more detail through the literature review and methodology chapters, as artists who work with and for feminist themes which have been identified as exploring bodies, embodiment, sexualities, gender identities, and gendered experiences, and who use digital methods to produce and/or exhibit their work. I will argue in chapter four that digital feminist artists can be considered a specific hidden population, and following from this idea, I use theoretical purposive sampling to gather participants who ultimately have taken part in this research. This type of sampling manifested in a reflexive approach to two major phases of sampling which I initially designed. Each phase consisted of searching online for exhibitions and artist websites and sending out email invitations to participate in the research. Following this sampling process, sixteen women agreed to take part in this research, and it is their voices and their experiences which this research centres upon. Through a thematic analysis of the interviews, I discuss three interrelated themes: Instagram, representation, and space. These three themes organise the discussions into separate chapters, and whilst they can be read as standalone, it is important to note that the themes are entwined and should be considered holistically.

1.3 Contributions to knowledge

In conducting this research to meet the aims mentioned previously, I make three main theoretical contributions to knowledge within the field of sociology of art, which contributes to the development of a specifically feminist sociology of art. As a result of my analysis and engagement with these critical discussions, this research makes three main theoretical contributions to knowledge across disciplines. These theoretical contributions centre on the themes of technology and art production, resistance, and embodiment. These contributions are discussed across the themes of Instagram, representation, and space which frame the three analysis chapters.

Firstly, looking towards the theoretical contributions of this research, in relation to technology and art production I offer the notion that Instagram is a specific site where feminist resistance

happens, and within this I suggest Instagram is beginning to replicate tenets of the traditional art world particularly through its censorship policies. This is done through the platform being used as a negotiated exhibition space, and the continuous negotiation of censorship within the platform highlights the type of resistive practice that happens at the intersection of feminism, digital space, and art. Recognising that Instagram is a current platform where feminist art is happening in itself contributes to understanding a changing landscape of the production of digital feminist art. As Instagram is a social media site, this is not a typical space for the production and consumption of art to be happening, and so this tells us that digital feminist artists are working outside of traditional art spaces, where resistance towards both the art world and the types of art they are making are enacted. This merging of feminism, art, and technology brings about new ways of thinking about how technology matters to art production especially when working with feminism, and allows for a conceptualisation of technology as a space for a new type of feminism and feminist aesthetic.

Instagram as an exhibition space is a significant contribution to the current literature because it addresses a gap in knowledge and allows a further conceptualisation of the relationship between art production and technology more broadly. The literature review will demonstrate how current literature does not yet extensively approach feminist art and its relationship to technology in a sociological way, so this analysis of how technology mediates the production of art for digital feminist artists' works alongside current literature in developing a more in-depth feminist sociology of art. This is important because it solidifies interdisciplinary ties between the sociology of art and feminist art history. Recognising and being situated within this interdisciplinary field means that this research can contribute to identifying the changing experiences of digital feminist artists within future research and explore how their experiences are situated and negotiated within the social world.

Moreover, my claims over how Instagram specifically is beginning to replicate traditional art world ideologies allows for a contemporary re-reading of cyberfeminist texts, which makes a contribution to feminist theory beyond thinking about art. Through a complex negotiation with Instagram policies and community guidelines, I argue that digital feminist artists resist boundaries which structure both the space, their bodies, and the production of their art. Reading this through cyberfeminist literature, my work challenges ideas that technology offers freedom from the materiality of the body for women, and that those digital spaces provide new and alternative ways of imagining gender. Whilst these dreams of disembodiment are played with through the production of digital feminist art, I argue that (dis)embodiment is a much more

complex experience for digital feminist artists, and so cyberfeminist imaginings may not be able to be fully realised within contemporary digital art settings, particularly as platforms such as Instagram take on patriarchal institutional ideologies. Therefore, my research is engaged with and asks new questions of cyberfeminism. Doing this is necessary because it challenges the ways in which feminism can be articulated and experienced both theoretically and materially when considering technology. My re-engagement with cyberfeminism within this research contributes to a revival of thinking about how feminist theory can address the multiple complex ways in which women experience contemporary digital spaces.

Secondly, the nature of resistance itself makes a contribution to feminist literature. Through the research, I develop a narrative of resistance as something quiet, a continuous and conscious practice which is embodied by digital feminist artists. Resistance is something that is happening at the intersection of feminism and digital spaces, and is deeply implicated in the negotiation of bodies, representation, and digital spaces for digital feminist artists. This resistance is about an awareness of boundaries and a conscious effort to challenge them through art production to contribute to a wider feminist politics. Through a detailed focus on how digital feminist artists experience the production of their work, I argue that resistance here can be conceptualised as an everyday practice of carving out spaces of comfort which acts as a subtle rebellion towards patriarchal ideologies. This particular idea about how resistance is enacted and embodied is an important contribution to feminist theory because it challenges what resistance means for feminist politics, and reinforces the notion that power is generated through the construction of alternative ways of knowing about feminism and art.

My argument about the ways in which resistance happens for digital feminist artists is an important contribution to knowledge because it challenges and reframes what resistance can mean for feminism. Literature exploring the relationship between feminism and technology discuss ways in which digital platforms can be useful for feminist consciousness raising, and allow more global feminist alliances to be formed, meaning that technology can be utilised by feminist movements to spearhead feminist activism and politics (Rehman, 2017; Bayfield, 2020; Matich, 2019; Clark-Parsons, 2018). Whilst these contributions are necessary and so valuable, my research here develops a different account of feminism's relationship to digital platforms which works alongside this literature to construct a broader picture of how technology can matter to feminism in contemporary contexts, particularly around the production of digital feminist art. In focusing on the everyday, embodied experiences of digital platforms and specifically Instagram, this research offers an account of feminism beyond, but

in relation to, feminist movements. This resistance is concerned with how digital feminist artists live with and through their feminism, and how they approach the production of their work and their experiences of digital spaces through this feminism. This is not to say that feminism is an individual pursuit or experience, and indeed the women involved in this research relate their feminism to wider feminist politics, but my research recognises that feminist resistance is an embodied and often deeply personal practice.

Finally, the third contribution to knowledge that I make with this research is concerned with embodiment. I argue throughout the thesis that digital feminist artists construct alternative feminist visual cultures through their engagement with Instagram, and this stems from a conscious engagement with their own sense of embodiment. Through efforts to challenge the male gaze and incorporate a more female gaze in the production of their work, engaging with subjectivity is central to how digital feminist artists navigate and experience embodiment. The ways in which digital feminist artists describe their relationship to their work and to the spaces that they inhabit online demonstrates their resistance towards patriarchal binaries which structure gender based on the materiality of the body. In highlighting their own subjectivity within their art, the digital feminist artists here spotlight the oppression that exists within essentialist thinking, and also shows how gender is a fluxing sense of embodiment which can flow between online and offline spaces. This resistance to binaries which contribute to a patriarchal social order is central to how digital feminist artists engage with the production of their work.

These ideas around embodiment are particularly important as they make a further contribution to cyberfeminist literature. Through a thorough dialogue between my analysis and cyberfeminist literature, I demonstrate that embodiment moves beyond a gender binary and beyond corporeality through feminist resistance. This matters because it means that embodiment can be understood as something that moves across offline and online spaces. For cyberfeminism, this is important because it means that it is possible to realise the liberatory potential of digital space for women but without the necessity of disembodiment. Through digital feminist art and the construction of an alternative feminist visual culture, digital feminist artists resist the idea that digital liberation can only happen through disembodiment. Embedding subjectivity into their production of art means that digital feminist artists resist binaries surrounding gender and the body, as well as those which structure online and offline spaces.

1.4 Rationale

Firstly, this research is necessary and important because it contributes to the development of a feminist sociology of art. Whilst developing a specific notion of resistance in order to contribute to the development of a feminist sociology of art is one of the main contributions that this research makes overall, the need to develop a feminist approach to thinking sociologically about art is also one of the main justifications for the necessity of this research.

The theoretical framework in which I situate and contextualise this work means that the research engages with multiple intersecting fields and seeks to speak to that intersection in order to make contributions to a specifically feminist sociology of art as an interdisciplinary field. In doing this, I am responding to Howson's (2005) call for a more developed feminist sociological approach to art, in which she argues that any feminist analysis of art must engage with the social and move beyond a sole focus on the textual qualities of art. By acknowledging the material and symbolic influence that feminist movements have had on feminist art production and consumption, she notes how social and political ideologies are deeply entwined with the production of feminist art. Therefore, it is imperative that a feminist approach to a sociological study of art must work from the space beyond the text, taking gender as a point of material, social, and political significance within feminist art production. She states that 'this space beyond the text – occupied by relations, practices, thoughts, feelings, actions – is excluded from current feminist approaches to the analysis and interpretation of women's art… a sociologically informed feminist approach begins from this space beyond the text, and proceeds by acknowledging its own contribution both to the production of women's art itself and to the identification of the latter as an object of feminist inquiry' (Howson, 2005, 56). In addressing this desire for a more sociologically informed feminism and a more feminist informed sociology, my research contributes to the development of a feminist sociology of art by engaging with practices, thoughts, feelings, and actions that digital feminist artists are engaged with, that are often excluded from feminist approaches to art. My research will delve further into how gender matters within these structures and will work to establish ways in which feminism can contribute to the narratives inherent to the discipline, whilst also offering a necessary troubling of dominant masculine narratives particularly when understanding women's lives and experiences, as well as ways of doing sociological research.

This contribution is valuable because it allows the development of theoretical tools which will be useful to further research into feminist art practice. This is particularly useful in the context of the emerging relationship between feminist art practice and technology. Existing research

which uses a critical feminist approach to understanding the emerging intersection of feminist art practice and technology make significant contributions to a feminist sociology of art which my current research can work alongside and continue developing further. Olszanowski (2014) for example, focuses on the self-imaging practices of women artists who use Instagram. In her qualitative work with three women and discursive analysis of a selection of their self-images, Olszanowski (2014) explores the tactics that these women have for circumventing censorship on Instagram. She discusses how her participants use a range of techniques including privatising their Instagram accounts, obscuring and distorting images of bodies, and timed removals of Instagram posts to demonstrate how women are navigating art production in the context of digital platforms. In doing this work she constructs a new conceptual framework from which to consider the nature of censorship and its relationship to women, particularly their bodies. Developing the concept of 'sensorship' (Olszanowski, 2014, 83), she generates a theoretical tool for thinking about the emerging relationship between art, women, and technology, which is useful in challenging the increasingly normative ways in which censorship happens for women and for digital feminist artists. My research is therefore important because it further contributes to this development of theoretical tools with which to think about the negotiation of feminism and technology through art production.

Where Olszanowski (2014) focuses on censorship and the notion of sentio-aestehtics, my research develops an account of resistance as it relates to digital feminist artists. This contribution is important because it sheds light on how women are navigating both feminism and digital spaces, and also highlights the centrality of feminist politics within forms of resistance. Continuing to develop this theoretical toolkit further contributes to a feminist sociology of art because it foregrounds women's experiences and their politics into understanding and conceptualising art production and aesthetics.

Secondly, this research is important because it provides insight into a contemporary cultural phenomenon. Beginning this research, I recognised an increasing resurgence of attention being paid to feminist art in general within museum and gallery spaces, and within everyday life more broadly. My research is important because it further explores this re-engagement with feminist art whilst identifying its more contemporary components. Fields (2012, 2) recognises this trend and writes about how, at her time of writing, during the past five years 'a number of major exhibitions in the United States and Europe have reassessed the innovations, impact, and legacy of the feminist art movement'. She goes on to discuss a number of exhibitions which have illuminated work originating from the feminist art movement and describes how they are

attempting to change the narrative surrounding feminist art being ignored and forgotten. Fields (2012) offers up the fact that Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) has been made a permanent installation at the Sackler Centre for Feminist Art in New York as evidence for this, alongside *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Butler & Mark, 2007), the first institutional exhibition which examines work developed through feminism, developed by MOCA curator Connie Butler. Whilst Fields (2012) examines the potential that this institutional resurgence of interest in feminist art holds, she is also wary of the extent to which this attention can impact narratives of art history, and the extent that it can affect meaningful dialogue, or material changes, for the lives of feminist artists who sit outside of the institutional structures.

Wilson (2008) also recognises a resurgence in interest surrounding feminist art, particularly attributing it to remedying institutional failings regarding women artists. She too discusses the impact that *Wack!* and the wider reignition of feminist art within the institution might have. Speaking specifically about the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) first feminist conference entitled *The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts*, Wilson (2008) notes how, although emerging from decades of art, theory, activism, and scholarship, the conference fell victim to repeating problematic tenets of feminist thinking such as ethnocentrism and essentialism. Although she notes how the conference alongside exhibitions such as *Wack!* and *Global Feminisms* tries to remedy past mistakes, they often fall short of capturing the complexities of the experiences of artists engaged with feminist activism both during the feminist art movement as well as today. She positions this resurgence of feminist art within the institution as a retrospective and suggests that whilst this work is vital in bringing attention to feminist art, artists who are working on feminist engaged practices today are existing in the shadows of what is being heralded as the feminist revolution. Their feminist futures, Wilson (2008) argues, are difficult because they exist within a world that is unfriendly to feminism politically but also celebratory of feminist histories. 'There is a very real difficulty in being a daughter of "art and the feminist revolution" *without the revolution*' Wilson (2008, 327) writes, noting how feminist artists now often do not feel that they are living through, or with, a feminist revolution as their predecessors were, and because of this, their work is taking different directions.

My research as detailed in this thesis cannot make attempts to rectify the array of challenges posed by this trend in revisiting the feminist art movement, and as this is empirical work, I cannot make claims which exist beyond the scope of experience of the women who participate in the research. My research is also not a review of artists' work or of any exhibitions, nor is it

an attempt to construct arguments pertaining to the quality of such reengagements with feminist art, so I cannot make claims towards how institutions manage digital feminist art. However, what my research will do is explore the experiences of those artists that Wilson (2008) described. Those who are making feminist art, who are engaged with feminisms *without the revolution*. My research here acknowledges the legacy of the feminist art movement and will explore its relevance both in terms of its politics and its aesthetics in relation to the experiences of digital feminist artists, whilst asking how and if those narratives of feminist art history matter to digital ways of art making practices. In doing this, my research is important because it recognises both a past and future of feminist art, and the specific focus on digital feminist artists is a necessary contribution in developing an account and an understanding of how feminism shapes, and is shaped by, contemporary digital feminist ways of producing art.

The digital aspect of this research speaks to the changing nature of feminist art within society, and an exploration into how feminist artists experience the digital is another necessary task that this research works towards. Following increasing awareness of feminism and feminist art both within the institution and outside, digital feminist art has also increasingly been recognised by multiple arts and culture platforms as a notable new social phenomenon. In 2014, for Dazed magazine, Steph Kretowicz identified ten feminist artists who worked digitally and coined the term 'digifeminist artist'. In doing so she wrote of the nebulousness of this type of art, noting how digifeminist artists work between the real and the virtual, ultimately functioning beyond binaries and across boundaries. Such ambiguity sets the premise for this work to be central to contemporary feminist politics, and Kretowicz asserts that digifeminist artists 'are feminist because of their audacity to self-mediate – to make themselves visible from the margins through the noise of Web 2.0 hegemony.'

Feminist resistance then is at the heart of digital feminist art making. Moreover, Helms (2020) does similar work in identifying women digital artists who are subverting both art world narratives and patriarchal narratives. Helms (2020) discussed the work of artist Gretchen Andrew, who uses search engine algorithms to propel her work to the top of search engine searches and hack major art world events. She does this to purposefully disrupt the art scene which has historically ignored and devalued women's work, and her digital skills cut through the masculinisation of digital culture more broadly. Helms (2020) recognises Andrew's work as a feminist disruption of digital culture which aims to challenge boundaries surrounding modernity and authenticity within art institutions whilst also championing women's work and voices. Similarly, Lombardo (2021) compiled a list of feminist digital creators for Design

Matters' Magazine. In her list, she featured women artists who are visible on social media, and urges readers to follow these accounts because they move beyond simple aesthetics and engage with feminist politics. This connection between aesthetics, social media, and feminism is highlighted by Lombardo (2021) as being a space for inclusivity, equality, body positivity, and community.

This being said, digital feminist art is not only happening from the margins, but is also beginning to be increasingly embraced by the art world. Vartanian (2020) wrote about nine women who are ruling the digital art world for TheArtGorgeous Magazine, listing an array of women from artists to gallery sales directors, to art Instagram account founders. In doing this, Vartanian (2020) highlights how digital cultures and art institutions are intertwined and connected, and she places feminist politics at the core of this relationship, spotlighting the feminist empowerment that is heralded as being central to this revival of feminism within the relationship between art and technology.

It is this emerging intersection between feminism, art, and technology that my research will explore. It is necessary to research this intersection because of the increasing recognition that it is garnering as demonstrated. My research here will offer an academic, empirical approach to this new social phenomenon, grounded within sociological and feminist theory, and will contribute to the wider discipline an understanding to discourses within an emerging field of research. My research is also important because it provides insight into the lives and the experiences of digital feminist artists. Because of the nature of this arena of cultural and social life, it is crucial to explore and understand the experiences of the women who are producing this work, as their experiences are central to the ever-changing ways in which art is conceptualised and theorised. Furthermore, the experiences of digital feminist artists are also central to the contemporary constructions of the body and embodiment within contemporary digital cultures. Whilst much of their work, as will be discussed in the analysis chapters, engages with bodies in multiple different ways and is therefore actively producing ways of knowing about bodies, digital feminist artists are also women with their own bodies which mediate their navigation through production and their existence in digital spaces. The complexities inherent to their involvement in this cultural phenomenon make this an urgent and timely area of study.

1.5 Resistance

Resistance is at the heart of this research. Whilst I have demonstrated how my notion of feminist resistance is one of the main contributions to knowledge that I make through this research, I also want to highlight how resistance plays, and has played, an essential role in the production of this work. From its design, my intentional methodological choices, my motivations for doing the work, to the tensions that I have felt throughout the process, I have enacted and embodied a sense of resistance that is central to my feminism which reaches far beyond the scope of this particular project. This section introduces and outlines some of the main choices that I have made which shape this thesis and which also contribute to the overall sense of resistance that this research demonstrates. In doing this, I highlight the value of my research beyond the contributions to knowledge.

My feminist approach to research is not just an academic position that I have adopted for the sake of the project, rather it is central to my way of being in the world and therefore the only position that I can take within research. The desire to challenge, critique, and construct alternative ways of knowing within this research is all part of a commitment to doing feminist work beyond the confines of academia. As such, throughout the process there have been tensions between being a feminist and existing within an academic setting, and these tensions frame my experiences as a researcher, and they also frame the research detailed here. Whilst I will discuss my reflections on the research process in more detail in chapter four, it is important to note here that the complexities inherent to being a feminist situated within academia have shaped the ways in which I have conducted the research, and I have navigated these tensions through a conscious resistance in my approach to working.

I draw mainly from traditional theoretical texts throughout the thesis where possible. The absence of contemporary literature is an intentional choice inherent to my feminist politics. Engaging and re-engaging with traditional feminist theory is a conscious rejection of ideals of progress inherent to a positivist ontology which is a clear focus of research in an academic setting mediated through markers of success and failure. Santos (2014) notes how citation metrics and winning grant money serve as some of the main criteria for academic success, and that these metrics are built upon positivist ontology. She goes on to discuss how within the field of gender studies, researchers have to engage in constant legitimisation and validation to prove intellectual legitimacy as a discipline, and this often means proving that the discipline is capable of producing *new* knowledges. As such, my choice to engage with older texts is a political choice which functions to disrupt an obsession with new and novel arguments within

academia as a marker of individual success. Instead, a re-engagement with older, more traditional texts highlights their value, and works to construct feminist knowledge as a continuous discourse which can be useful in making sense of contemporary experiences. The value in this looking to more traditional feminist texts in my work is that I recognise these texts as knowledges that are situated and partial, but that are also legitimate sources of knowledge which can continue to make sense of contemporary experiences.

Furthermore, a conscious re-imagining of traditional feminist theory offers a critique of how feminism is perceived more broadly within the academy. The idea that feminism has happened in particular waves presents feminist knowledge as a linear form of progression. Describing feminism happening in waves holds feminist knowledge as a relic of a revolution rather than a way of conceptualising social and political life more widely. Boyle (2015) argues that to keep feminism at this critical distance within academia is to limit its potential for meaning making in contemporary settings. She goes on to note how perhaps it is true that academia works by developing one theory to supersede another, but this is not how feminism works, nor is it how feminism should work. The wave analogy is unhelpful because it suggests that feminism is something that has been done, that is completed. However, as Boyle (2015, 887) urges 'it is the nature of scholarship – but, particularly, of feminist scholarship – that the insights of the past need to be continually rediscovered'. A return to traditional scholarship then challenges what it means to produce new or novel arguments, and this resists the linear ways of working with theory. In my research, the use of more traditional texts is a way of continually rediscovering the past. In this, I am not claiming a history that I was not part of, particularly thinking about what is named feminism's second wave, but I am disrupting the notion that those theoretical arguments are completed, highlighting the continued importance of feminist theory in conceptualising contemporary social life.

I also make the deliberate decision to engage mainly with texts written by women. There is a longstanding tradition within feminist scholarship that recognises the power and the politics of citation as an act of feminist resistance, and my work contributes to that scholarship by continuing to cite women's work as an act of resistance towards the reproduction of patriarchal knowledges. Citation practices uphold the dominance of white, heterosexual men across disciplines (Ahmed, 2013; Maude, 2014), so choosing to cite women's work is not only an ethical feminist performance, but it also actively disrupts white heteromasculinism (Mott and Cockayne, 2017). White heteromasculinism dominates the social sciences as a discipline and area of knowledge production. White heteromasculinism works from bell hooks' (1984)

concept of the 'neo-colonial white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' and describes the intersectional system of oppression which bolsters the status of white, able bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered men whilst marginalising voices which do not fit that category (Mott and Cockayne, 2017). A careful consideration of who to cite is important because it challenges the types of knowledges that are produced which influences what it is possible to know, who can be knowers, and who is excluded from such discourses. My citing women is demonstrative of my contribution to the reproduction of feminist narratives within the discipline (Ahmed, 2013) and of my resistance towards reproducing narratives that are exclusionary and assumed objective. In this sense, my choices around citation practices can be read as a furthering of the resistive power that this research holds central.

My approach to methodology is also guided by feminist principles and therefore contributes to this overall sense of resistance to the ways in which knowledges are produced within the academy. I use a reflexive and flexible approach when working with participants to challenge the relationship between researcher and researched in terms of uneven power. I am conscious that the women who took part in this research are themselves legitimate knowers who actively produce understandings of their own experiences, and I want to recognise their own claims to knowledges that are produced about themselves. Because of this, I initially aimed to co-produce this research with participants, including them in the design of the research and in the analysis. Whilst this would have made significant claims in relation to resisting heteropatriarchal ways of producing knowledge, and would have felt more valuable to me, the constraints of a PhD programme meant that I was unable to carry this out. Instead, I chose unstructured online interviews, and found ways for participants to be involved with the research beyond the interviews that would not compromise my programme. I spent a long time emailing during the recruitment phase to build rapport with participants, we spent a good proportion of the interviews speaking about the research on a broad scale, and I sent back transcripts to participants which they were able to add to or reconsider their ideas. Doing these small acts meant that I could conceive of this project as research *with* digital feminist artists, rather than research *about* them. Although these are small methodological choices, they contribute to the wider ways in which I want to consciously construct knowledges which resist positivistic notions of what is possible to know. This approach also works to centre women's marginal and partial experiences as legitimate sources of knowingness.

1.5 Definitions of key terms

Throughout the thesis I refer to key terms such as feminism and feminist, representation, resistance, digital, and embodiment. In this section I will define each of these key terms in relation to how I understand and use them in this research:

1.5.1 Feminism

I use feminism as a term to describe both a social movement and also a critical theoretical perspective. This is not to say that feminism as a social movement is separate from feminism as a theoretical perspective, rather that they intertwine and inform each other. As Hines (2020) notes, the development of feminism as theory in the west happened alongside the emergence of the feminist social and political movement during the late 60s. In this way, I engage with feminism as activism in that it works towards challenging unequal social structures and improving the lives of women. In my research here I work from a feminist perspective, recognising that there is an inherent politics to feminist theorising.

I understand and use feminism in this thesis as a critical project, meaning that feminism as a theoretical critical approach allows me to interrogate social life through a particular social constructionist lens to actively analyse and understand women's experiences (Scholz, 2010). Regarding feminism as a theoretical perspective, although I acknowledge that there is no unified notion of feminism, I use the term to refer to a set of ideas about social life which highlight the ways in which women are subordinate to men within an unequal social structure. Taking gender as a key site of oppression, I use term feminism in my work to recognise how patriarchy is central to a political, social, and cultural imbalance of power which is socially produced, reproduced, and maintained (Richardson, 2020). Gender is therefore a social division rather than a difference between people. Viewing gender as a social division means that feminism examines how the reproduction of gender differences within social life is connected to wider social structures and institutions that produce inequalities between women and men (Abbott, 2013). This being said, feminism as a concept must incorporate difference. As discussed throughout the thesis, woman or women is not a universal category and so feminism as a concept, and as is used here, must be intersectional. Introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) intersectionality refers to how our multiple identities and sites of oppression are compounded by one another to form overlapping systems of oppression and domination. As such, our experiences of discrimination and oppression are the result of our unique and overlapping social identities. Intersectionality therefore offers a way of thinking about how

multiple forms of inequality are routed through each other (Grabham, 2009) and systematically interweave and give shape to each other (Taylor, Hines, & Casey, 2010).

Feminism is therefore understood and used within my research here as a critical tool to examine the lives and experiences of digital feminist artists, and to explore how these experiences are shaped and mediated through notions of power and oppression.

1.5.2 Representation

Following on from this notion that there is no unified notion of woman, or of feminism, it is important to carefully outline how I can understand the idea of representation in my research. The women who participated in my research discuss ideas of representation and so this forms a key theme in my analysis, and whilst there are discussions of how digital feminist artists in this sample work to represent women's experiences or bodies, this is not based on an essentialist assumption about the universalism of womanhood. Butler (1990, 3) critiques feminist theory on the basis that it has historically assumed that 'there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is sought'. So, whilst representation is a central theme here and has a complex relationship to feminist thinking, it is important to outline how I work with the concept of representation in this work.

Borrowing from cultural studies, I understand representation to refer to how meanings are produced and exchanged through language between people within a culture (Hall, 1997). Representation is therefore the process by which we make sense of experiences, people, objects, and events, and how we symbolise and express that sense to others in a way that the meanings can be understood. Hall (1997) outlines how there are two processes referred to as systems of representation involved in the production of meaning of concepts. The first process is the system, where everything is associated with a group of concepts which, without them, it would not be possible for us to interpret meaning in the world. This is a complex process whereby concepts are arranged into multiple systems of classifications and distinctions. Language is the second system of representation when it comes to constructing meanings, where the concepts need to be expressed into a words, sounds, or images that the culture can understand. These images, words, and sounds, often referred to as signs, represent the concepts that make up a shared conceptual map within a given culture (Du Gay, 1997). All signs that are then organised and categorised in relation to other signs express a language with meaning.

Within my research, I take a constructionist approach to understanding representation, which means that I recognise that language is socially shaped and cannot be fixed in its meaning (Hall, 1997). Moreover, I acknowledge how we construct meanings through representational systems, and that meanings do not simply just exist. Rather 'it is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others' (Hall, 1997, 11). This approach to representation within my research means that when discussing representation in terms of the experiences of digital feminist artists, I can conceptualise this as a way of meaning making. This is particularly important when considering how digital feminist artists in this sample use representation as a tool for resistance to dominant ways of knowing within patriarchal social structures.

1.5.3 Resistance

With the notion of resistance, I refer to how power and oppression are challenged and negotiated. Resistance in this regard has been central to feminism as a social movement and as a theoretical perspective as feminism is concerned with actively challenging gendered relations of power enmeshed with oppressive ideologies, policies, cultural practices, and social structures (Ikavalko & Kantola, 2017). Resistance in this way has a relationship with power, and we cannot separate the two, as power relations are always shaping different forms of resistance.

In looking to power to help conceptualise resistance, Foucault (1991) outlines how discipline should be considered one mechanism of power that works to regulate people by inscribing norms. Through complex systems of surveillance and punishment, self-disciplinary practices emerge which reinforce the notion that difference to the regulated norm is punishable and therefore inferior. This is key to much feminist theorising which explores the complexity of norms which govern and regulate women's subjectivities as well as the punishments experienced by those who sit outside of such norms (Butler, 1990). Discussing this articulation of power, Johansson and Lilja (2013, 269) identify resistance as 'a response to power from "below"; a subaltern practice that can challenge, negotiate, and undermine power. Moreover, while resistance is a response to power, it might also be parasitic on power and/or nourish as well as undermine it'. Disciplinary power could therefore be resisted by challenging and negotiating norms, and by rejecting self-disciplinary practices which are often heavily gendered. This definition is how resistance is understood and used within my research. Resistance is considered as always in relation to power, and through the concepts of challenge

and struggle too. Thomas and Davies (2005, 720) emphasise the importance of the inclusion of 'low level' forms of resistance which encapsulates struggle and challenge. This definition is something that I work with in my research as digital feminist artists in my sample routinely practice resistance in this way.

Looking more specifically at the relationship between feminism, art, and resistance, Forte (1988) examines how resistance can be understood in women's performance art, and I draw on her work here to highlight how important resistance is in thinking not only about feminism, but also about feminist art practice. She also defines resistance from a Foucauldian perspective, detailing how resistance involves struggles over questioning the status of the regulated individual whilst at the same time asserting the right to be different. She writes about resistance in terms of representation, about how these struggles over regulation are focused on opposing gendered representations which are imposed upon us, stating that 'women's performance art is a powerful manifestation of this struggle, as a resistance to the economic and ideological violence done to women.' (Forte, 1988, 232). Further, Forte (1988) recognises how resistance can also be a negotiation, and rejection, of disciplinary powers for women performance artists. Within this, she suggests that women performance artists in particular are embroiled in feminist resistance towards patriarchal ideologies by searching for alternative discourses to make sense of their experiences outside of a patriarchal framework.

Within my research I begin from this position, recognising how resistance is always in conversation with power, and the work of resistance is characterised by struggle, challenge, and negotiation. Whilst resistance has been conceptualised in terms of women's performance art, my research here explores resistance from the standpoint of digital feminist artists to contribute to defining resistance, especially in relation to feminism.

1.5.4 Digital

Within this research I use the term digital to refer to both the technologies and platforms that digital feminist artists use for their work, and also the broader digital culture in which they are embedded. The mediums and techniques used by my sample of digital feminist artists are all digital, and encompass digital photography, augmented reality, digital drawing and illustration, digital collage, and 3D animation. Digital in this technical definition is the opposite of analogue, because there is no one-to-one correspondence with what is being depicted in the image(s) being produced. With digital technologies such as digital photography, patterns of light are converted into binary code, which is converted into different outputs. This code then

can be produced, reproduced, duplicated, and materialised in many different ways (Cubitt, 2006). It is this mutability that give digital technology its defining quality (Rose, 2021). Way (2016) notes how the art world defines digital art by conflating technology with digital computing, hardware, and software, and so recognising digital as a term that encapsulates computer technology and internet technologies mirrors the artworld's own perception (see also Ensmenger, 2012 and Wands, 2006).

In reference to digital technologies and digital spaces, I begin from the position that the digital is not absent from meaning making. Rather the digital is central to the production of meaning within social life, in that it actively contributes to the construction of subjectivities and ideologies, and visual culture more broadly (Jones, 2006). Hayles (1999) identifies how the growth of digital technologies gives us new ways to consider what it means to be human, arguing that we are becoming posthuman due to the increases in flows of information between technologies, humans, and animals. She notes how these flows of information are so deeply interconnected and always co-evolving, and this alerts us to the possibility of new ways of knowing about the body. In discussing digital art specifically, Hansen (2004) argues that the body becomes a key processor of information when it comes to digital images, furthering the notion that digital technologies are central to our embodied experiences.

For women, digital spaces and digital technologies have been noted as integral to the production of the self. In discussing how feminist artists navigate Instagram censorship policies, Olszanowski (2014, 9) suggest that a 'link between imaging technologies and conceptions of the self is at the heart of the ways in which women use these technologies as tactics that in turn shape their subjectivity'. Similarly to Farman (2012) who argues that digital technologies and digital media (such as Instagram) are central to the production of new or alternative bodies, Olszanowski (2014) suggests that women are active producers of bodies and space and ultimately community, through their embodied and complex relationship with digital technologies and digital platforms. I, too, use the term digital in my work to refer to the complex ways in which subjectivity and embodiment are navigated and negotiated to construct alternative digital cultures and ways of knowing.

1.5.5 Embodiment

Following an increasing interest in the experiences of the body and embodiment from sociologists since the 1990s, my research is interested in the social constructions of the body and how the social body itself is experienced. This turn to embodiment emerges in line with a

feminist tradition of rejecting cartesian mind/body dualisms, where the mind is awarded the more significant role in understanding social life. The body in sociology has therefore been considered an absent presence (Shilling, 1993) as the body has historically been bound to the disciplines of biology and medicine, considered an opposite of the social. The concept of embodiment then offers an understanding of how bodies are social, and how they are central to understanding how selves are experienced and produced through interactive, social processes (Shilling, 2013). Embodiment, or a notion of an embodied self, takes into account the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of people to challenge the dualism between mind and body, and to express how central the experience of the body is to understanding the social world. As Woodward (2020) highlights, embodiment is fluid and fluxing, it works to challenge cartesian dualism, and is inextricably linked to how we can understand selves. Working from a feminist perspective, which is the perspective I take within this research, Woodward (2020) notes how gender and sexuality are embodied in multiple complex ways, which mean that a fixed binary for understanding gender is impossible.

I work with the concept of embodiment in this research to explore and further challenge dualisms from a feminist perspective. Women have historically been reduced to the fleshiness, or the biology, of their bodies and this cartesian association of the body with irrationality, emotion, and femaleness has resulted in material structural inequalities for women (Young, 2005). Feminists have explored the possibilities of technology in troubling these injustices, for example Donna Haraway (1991) offers the concept of the cyborg to show how boundaries around flesh and technology and people and things can be blurred or merged into one. Similarly, Sunden (2001) explores how cyberfeminist dreams of a disembodied utopia can contribute to alternate ways of understanding bodies in relation to technology. More thorough and detailed discussions of embodiment in relation to cyberfeminist literature are more prominent throughout chapter seven. I highlight some of these ideas here because embodiment is central to these discussions, and I explore them in the thesis through the lens of embodiment, in that I use the concept to examine how boundaries are blurred and crossed, to consider how materiality matters across digital spaces for my sample of digital feminist artists, and the implications of this for feminist theory more broadly.

1.6 Thesis structure

Before moving on to begin reviewing literature in order to situate my research, I firstly want to outline the structure of the thesis to demonstrate how the aims are explored and how the arguments are developed.

In the following chapter, chapter two, I review literature from across the broad fields of the sociology of art and feminist art history and aesthetics. Within this, I also look to feminist sociological theory and digital sociology, especially to think through women's historic relationship with technologies. Through evaluating literature within these different areas of study, I begin to contextualise and situate my own research at their intersection. In this chapter, I also identify the need for a further development of a specifically feminist sociology of art, which brings together tenets of each section of the literature review. Engaging with literature in this chapter helps me to identify some central themes that enable the construction of the main aims of the research, specifically in thinking about constructions and experiences of the body and embodiment, as well as identifying the need for considering how digital art practice relates to wider feminist activisms. Moreover, engaging with the literature in chapter two allows me to recognise key themes that I develop throughout the analysis. For example, whilst the notion of resistance is central to my own analysis, the foundations of feminist resistance are rooted within previous feminist scholarship. As well as resistance, considerations of embodiment are also grounded in foundational cyberfeminist texts, and so the literature review allows me to set the groundwork for my future analysis as well as contributing to structuring the aims of the project.

Chapter three, Feminist ways of knowing, explores feminist epistemology which forms a guiding principle of this research, and is something that is carried through beyond the methodological framework. These discussions follow on from considerations of epistemic positions across all of the theoretical areas that I draw from within the literature review, and also works to provide context for the following methodology chapter. In chapter three I evaluate different feminist epistemological positions such as feminist empiricism, standpoint theory, and postmodernism. This discussion about what it is possible to know and the ways in which we know them is important because it sets a grounding for the way that I approach all aspects of methodology, as well as how I approach analysing data and ultimately influences the types of arguments that I make throughout. This chapter also works to provide a justification for the adoption of postmodern feminism, with the influence of feminist standpoints, as the epistemological position in my research.

After this, in chapter four, I outline and discuss the methodological approach and the methods used for this research. Every methodological decision is presented as a conscious choice which highlights my commitment to feminist ways of working and seeks to further challenge the values that sociological research holds. This chapter details the design of the research, the

sampling methods used, reflections on unstructured online interviews, ethical considerations, thematic analysis, and reflections on the research process overall. I include in this chapter a careful consideration of how digital feminist artists should be seen as a hidden population, and I also argue that online unstructured interviewing can be utilised as a specifically feminist approach.

Chapter five, Instagram as feminist resistance, is the first of three discussion chapters which explore my thematic analysis of the interviews that I conducted. In this chapter I highlight Instagram as a site of feminist resistance for digital feminist artists, and I detail the ways in which the interviewees navigate tensions experienced on Instagram through their production of digital feminist art. Within this, I express how they often use Instagram to exhibit and share their art, which works to challenge boundaries and destabilises knowledges inherent to the art world as a patriarchal institution. Within this, digital feminist artists create new ways of knowing about art by making women's work visible and deinstitutionalising art spaces. This being said, this chapter also explores the ways in which Instagram adopts and reinforces censorship which in turn makes it represent more traditional art institutions. The censorship that digital feminist artists experience on Instagram restricts the scope of their feminist resistance, and this is a continuous struggle. Censorship is grappled with further in this chapter, and I use the space to hear how these digital feminist artists navigate the tension within their work and within their use of Instagram, ultimately spotlighting their conscious acts of rebellion through working within the tensions.

In chapter six, Representations in digital feminist art, I continue to develop an account of resistance as experienced by digital feminist artists. In this chapter I analyse how the body plays a significant role in the production of digital feminist art both in terms of representing bodies in the work, and also in the ways that digital feminist artists relate to their work through their own experiences of materiality. More specifically, I look to how digital feminist artists reclaim the female nude and work to construct a feminist visual language from which to represent and think about the body. I also discuss the possibilities for a female gaze in this chapter, outlining how digital feminist artists consider and develop their specific female gaze(s) in their work. I organise this into two main themes, thinking firstly about how digital feminist artists represent the male nude in order to resist and reclaim the body from patriarchal ideologies, and also through thinking about how a female gaze is regulated in digital spaces. The discussions here continue to develop an account of the tensions and the binaries that

structure the experiences of digital feminist artists and further highlights the ways in which feminist resistance is enacted by digital feminist artists.

Chapter seven, Navigating digital spaces, constructs a more focused analysis of how digital spaces themselves are experienced by digital feminist artists particularly in relation to embodiment. Again, I explore the tensions inherent to online spaces, and express the ways in which online spaces can be experienced as both liberatory spaces and spaces of fear for digital feminist artists. I also delve into ideas around the gendered nature of digital space, demonstrating how digital feminist artists have differing ideas pertaining to the internet being a gendered or genderless place, and grapple with their own positioning in relation to these ideas. I present the concept of the avatar in this chapter, which demonstrates how digital feminist artists work consciously with concepts of embodiment in their practice to make visible the fluidity of gendered embodiment, challenging binaries surrounding gender and the body. This chapter takes on a deeper critical engagement with cyberfeminist texts and I situate my research within this literature more fully throughout this chapter. I contribute to traditional feminist theorising of online spaces by arguing that, for digital feminist artists, online spaces are increasingly beginning to replicate city spaces which threatens the liberatory potential of the space for women and for feminism on a wider scale.

In chapter eight, Conclusions, I draw together the discussions and ideas that arise throughout the thesis so far. I begin this chapter with reflecting on the aims of the research and how I have gone about researching them, situating my research within wider feminist sociological literature. Moving on, I then detail the three main theoretical contributions that this research makes to wider literature, specifically thinking about technology and art production, the notion of resistance, and embodiment. I also outline the contributions that this work makes to feminist methodologies, particularly highlighting the success of using online interviews to research experiences of digital spaces for women. I also reflect on the value and limitations of my research within this chapter, and I end this chapter by considering the directions that this research can take into the future.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This research project is situated within both the sociology of art and feminist theory. The theoretical backdrop for this research is therefore interdisciplinary, engaging primarily in sociological and feminist theories, and also working across art historical narratives and digital sociology. In reviewing literature from these related fields, I will highlight the necessity for a distinctly feminist sociology of art, which can bring together tenets from the sociology of art and feminist art history to develop a critical study of the context of contemporary, digital feminist art production from the standpoint of digital feminist artists.

In section 2.2 I outline major debates within the sociology of art. Sociologists have not always incorporated the arts into their theorising of social life. As Zolberg (1990) clearly articulates, many sociologists have rejected the study of art and aesthetics, assuming that those questions were dealt with in other disciplines, namely philosophy, history, and literary criticism. She concluded that before the 1970s, the majority of social scientists who dealt with questions of art and aesthetics were 'viewed as intellectuals in a broad sense or as radicals, but not really proper sociologists' (Zolberg, 1990, 51). A shift in the discipline came about through the publication of two seminal texts: Becker's (2008) *Art Worlds*, and Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction*. These works serve as foundational texts particularly within American and European sociology, but whilst Becker's work situates art within social organisation rather than aesthetics, grounding the concept of art within the social realm, Bourdieu's work highlights the need for unmasking illusions in that a sociology of art is akin to psychoanalysis. This section outlines both of these approaches to the sociology of art, and considers how sociology as a discipline can effectively incorporate the study of art with a particular focus on feminist art. In doing this, I will look to a range of other approaches to the sociology of art including Heinich's (1998) interpretive approach to de la Fuente's (2007, 2010) new sociology of art. Through reviewing this literature, I highlight the necessity to incorporate a feminist theoretical lens to contribute to the development of a specifically feminist sociology of art.

Following this, in section 2.3 I further underscore the importance of embedding feminist theory into this research by looking to feminist art history and feminist aesthetics. Feminist approaches to art worlds, similarly to Becker (2008) and Bourdieu (1984), outline art as a structural sphere which produces and reproduces gendered inequalities. Parker and Pollock (2013) are instrumental in developing this approach from a critique of art history. Feminist perspectives

have been present within art history and within cultural and visual studies, but as Howson (2005) points out, a specific feminist *sociology* of art is not necessarily fully articulated as a discipline. Howson (2005) highlights how feminist theorising relating to art falls into two categories; the structural context as to how women produce visual art, and the art itself which focuses on the politics of representation particularly surrounding the body. Whilst both of these have been integral in developing a feminist approach to art, there remains scope to develop a specific feminist sociology of art with a particular focus on the digital.

Finally in section 2.4 I focus more heavily on the relationship between feminism, technology, and art. In this section I will discuss the challenges that digital art poses to art as an institution, and explore its relationship to feminism and feminist art through a shared epistemology of art production. This section grapples with definitions surrounding digital art, and notes how the disruptive nature of digital art in both its elusive form and style becomes central to the ways in which digital art can be known (Drucker 2013). Similarities are drawn between the production of a digital art history and the history of women's relationship to technology more broadly. I explore cyberfeminist ideas such as Wajcman's (2010) notion that technology is in itself inherently gendered, acting as a patriarchal social force which limits women's possibilities and controls their bodies. In critiquing this approach, I engage with Plant's (1997) ideas focused on understanding the alliance between women and technology, and outline the usefulness in thinking about how her work can contribute to a dissolution of boundaries between women and technology. This section also looks to Haraway's (1985) notion of the cyborg, exploring the pleasure in blurring dichotomies to engender a postgendered reality. Following these discussions, I focus further on how cyberfeminism has influenced the production of feminist art both in practice and in style, and move beyond this to conceptualise the ways in which digital technologies rely on a specific feminist aesthetic to construct both feminist communities and a specific feminist visual culture. This section ultimately highlights dominant narratives regarding the relationship between women, technology, and art, and I argue that within this work, my research can contribute the experiences of digital feminist artists in relation to how they position themselves in relation to the binaries which structure digital spaces and digital art.

2.2 The sociology of art

Becker (2008) understands artistic work to be the joint activity of a large amount of people. The continuous cooperation of work becomes routine, and these patterns of activity make up what he calls an 'art world'. Art worlds include both the production and consumption of art

and encompass every activity necessary for the continuation of the art world, from the formulation of an idea of what the work will be, to the training required for the work to be performed, the distribution of resources or equipment necessary to the work, and the response and appreciation of the work. To maintain the stability of an art world, each person involved in the participation of the production of art has a 'bundle of tasks' specific to them, their skillset, and role within the production. This means that all art is supported by an extensive division of labour and responsibility. This is most obvious in performances, where there is a clear distinction between who wrote the scripts, who wrote the music, who plays the music, who does the acting, who manages the stage, who creates props, costumes, and make-up, who makes and sells tickets, and who responds with emotion and a shared culture of knowing how to respond to theatre.

Divisions of labour are much less overt in works of art which are considered individual such as painting or poetry, where it is assumed that the artist imagines the idea and carries out the work to produce a finished product. However, there is a reliance on manufacturers to create the canvas, the pencils, the paint and so on. And more importantly, the artwork needs to be received with an intelligent and emotional response from someone, an audience. This constant collaborative process, the art world, is bound in shared cultures of meaning which make artwork appear as it finally does. Artwork does not have to occur in these terms; it would still exist if parts of the collaboration were missing. If nobody admired the work, it would still exist as a part of the art world, but in a different context. Sometimes books do not get published, they are not distributed by publishers, but they are still books, and they are still the result of a process of activities which now exists in a different way. Art can exist in many different forms. It is this structured collective network that is coined an 'art world'. The importance of this work has been consciously well documented within the Sociology of art, and Becker is considered an influential theorist within the study of culture (Kaufman, 2004; Katz, 2006). This is because his analysis shifts from a focus on the individual as artist to an understanding of the network of people who work to produce and maintain an art world. Not only does this offer an extensive reading of how artistic production happens on a very pragmatic and explicit level, it also develops an understanding of the intricacies of cultural life.

Concluding that social actors participating in an art world refer to current *conventions* to organise their cooperation, Becker (2008) rests his theory on collective beliefs which work to structure action, which in turn governs how art worlds function and produce artistic work. Acord and Denora (2008, 225), when thinking through the concept of conventions in Becker's

work, discern that individual action is 'structured by an appeal (deliberate or unconscious) to these shared conventions – the implicit culture of the field'. Similarities can be drawn between Bourdieu's (1993) concept of artistic fields and Becker's (2008) concept of art worlds when understanding notions of structure and conventions. Bourdieu distinguishes a field as a theoretical space made up of objective relations which is different to social relationships. A field is therefore a system of social positions which are structured by relations of power and a struggle for capital (power) amongst members within the field. Fields are constant sites of struggle between the dominant and dominated where certain groups of social actors can structure the field to ensure their group maintains a position of privilege and power. The success which is considered most powerful is more conceptual than material, and consists of capital which can include social, cultural, economic and symbolic. Objective relations structure social relationships, they are the underlying forces of any cultural sphere. In this sense, people involved in the same theoretical field are there due to their structured relationship to economic and cultural resources. Social actors within these cultural arenas are open to take positions within the field, a space of possibility, which structures cultural activity.

According to Bourdieu, actors are most likely to pursue cultural and social activity with others who are socially similar to themselves, forming solid social relations. When actors are close in the field, their habitus is similar, and so they are drawn to each other and the shared activities associated with that specific field. The theoretical space of a field is made up of taste, which is a comment on the structure of social relations rather than social relationships between actors and is a feature of habitus. Taste 'unites and separates' (Bourdieu, 1984, 49) social actors. As taste is one the products, the manifested preferences, of the conditions associated with a specific class, it unites those who are the product of the same conditions. In doing this, taste also allows the distinguishing of these preferences from all others. As the foundation of habitus, taste becomes something that feels natural and intrinsic to groups of people, and can account for the rejection of the tastes of others on the basis that they appear unnatural. This presents a structural barrier between classes.

In discussing art, Bourdieu (1984) uses the concept of taste to understand aesthetic sensibilities between social classes, expressing how art is produced within the possibilities of the cultural field. Using class as a structure of social relations, people in middle classes have early access to art within their cultural field, so possess the correct knowledge and capital relevant to be a powerful social actor within the cultural field, whereas lower classes give away their social position through their lack of knowledge and the 'mistakes they make in the game of high

culture' (Prior, 2005, 124). For example, not understanding, or being aware of, a particular reference in a piece of art reveals a social origin which has failed to equip the social actor with the means to handle high culture appropriately, highlighting a lack of belonging which comes from the structures of habitus. A work of art will only have meaning when it is viewed through the gaze of someone who possesses the cultural capital to understand the codes in which the work was produced. Taste, the appreciation of works of art, rests on a history of shared knowledge of the field, the objective relations of class. In this sense, the categories employed to appreciate artwork are historically bound in a twofold relationship by their ability to grasp taste but also by their power generated by cultural capital, to reinstate those very categorisations of art marked by taste. Actors distinguish themselves from others by the distinctions they make through taste, they distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly, and these dispositions of taste rest on the habitus of social actors (Bourdieu, 1984).

The similarity between Becker and Bourdieu stem from both standpoints viewing art production and reproduction as occurring through some kind of shared code of knowingness amongst social actors in the field or network. Similar to the notion of habitus, conventions refer to the deeply engrained routinisation of cooperation of a network of social actors, and they both acknowledge how the embodiment of these conventions is required to maintain participation and negotiation of fields or worlds. However, Bottero and Crossley (2011) point out how Becker rejects any emphasis on social structure, preferring an interactionist approach to art worlds. A general critique of Interactionism is that it neglects to answer or reflect on questions of structural power, and Bourdieu does negate this criticism with a strong focus on structural underlying relations in the concept of fields. However, the notion of fields is also problematic as it does not account for how objective relations actually come into play. Through a purely structural lens, it is difficult to understand how these relations are generated in the first place due to the lack of agency awarded to social actors. Without an account for relationships, the theory lacks a thorough understanding of the mechanisms which generate similarities within habitus. This being said, one strong implication of Bourdieu's work is that today it can be used to promote the systematic need to make equal the social, economic, and educational differences spanning fields. This is because of the focus specifically on perception and consumption of art. Through understanding art consumption as a structural division of social actors, Bourdieu points to the ways in which art museums become cultural meeting places for the reproduction of shared codes and knowledge, a place to reinstate and unconsciously practice habitus. In *The Love of Art*, Bourdieu and Darbel (1991) outline how the acquisition of cultural capital is a

long and complex process of learning bound by social structures, which begins within the family and education. This allows a reading of his work to understand how art spaces can reinforce class divisions and ultimately legitimate social and cultural inequalities, shedding light on how social structures could be changed to allow for greater participation and access to art and art spaces.

Whilst Becker and Bourdieu have occupied a dominant position within the sociology of art, and are generally agreed to be two of the most influential paradigms within the field (de la Fuente, 2007), Zolberg (1990) points towards the difficulties of merging sociology and the arts. In her important work, Zolberg (1990) argues that the antagonistic relationship between aestheticians and sociologists is characterised by different approaches to the epistemic position of art objects and artists. She suggests that aestheticians consider art as occupying a position of uniqueness, whereas sociologists assume a regularity of art as they place it in the realm of the everyday rather than the sublime. Prior to Bourdieu's (1993, 139) assertion that 'sociology and art do not make good bedfellows', Zolberg (1990) argues for a dissolution of boundaries between art specialists and sociologists, suggesting that each one has much to learn from one another. With this, she attempts a reconciliation between Becker and Bourdieu, between ethnomethodology and structuralism, by indicating the complementary positions between the two. In her view, neither Becker's art world nor Bourdieu's field are absolute, but they can complement each other. This is because Becker works from a micro level position of social interactions whereas Bourdieu stresses the importance of social structures from a macro perspective. Zolberg (1990, 214) concludes that 'merely assuming that the arts reflect their society is a virtual cliché that provides little illumination of the complex relationship between culture and society. Contextualisation has to be interpreted richly and in depth. This entails paying attention to micro and macro levels of society: considering structure and agency encompassing cultural values as well as material interests. Only then can production, dissemination, and reception of the arts be fruitfully observed over time and across societal boundaries'.

Moreover, although Bourdieu does offer an account of difference based on class, there is a significant lack from both Bourdieu and Becker of focus on the complex web of structural and social inequalities which are all intersecting to produce very individualised experiences of art worlds. We need a more nuanced conception of the intersections of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age within art worlds to create an updated version of these theories of culture and art. But simply stating that these theories are outdated would be an inadequate criticism.

There have been huge changes in the ways that art is produced and consumed. Fyfe and Macdonald (1996) acknowledge that art museums have changed drastically over the last century and should not be read purely as spaces of social reproduction. The availability of technology has changed the way that art is produced and disseminated, and the rise of community based outreach programmes utilising the arts (Ulbricht, 2015) have all contributed to a culture which is conscious of widening participation, and an art world which is notably making changes to rectify the limitations of structural social access to art. Bourdieu and Becker cannot have foreseen these modernising changes, which is why Prior (2005, 135) calls for a warping of Bourdieu's ideas. He concludes that:

> 'we need a Bourdieu whose categories can keep up with an accelerated modernity, a modernity maximised, a modernity where cultural forms are more mobile, institutions more permeable, and where the embodied inequalities of gender, class, and ethnicity are relatively durable but also frequently reconstructed'.

This would mean maintaining the strong elements of structure within Bourdieu's work, but stretching concepts such as habitus to encompass multiple identities and examine how well these tangles of old and new concepts can interrogate experiences of art perception. Prior's (2005) work is reminiscent of Zolberg's (1990) here in that he is calling for a sociological study of art which encompasses both structure and agency, whilst including the need for a sociology of art which is sympathetic to technological and social changes.

This warping of ideas is particularly pertinent when considering the epistemic position from which a sociology of art is positioned. The structural elements of sociological work on art have been heavily challenged particularly by Nathalie Heinich (1998), who argues that sociology comes from an inadequate epistemic standpoint to fully comprehend the world of arts. In considering the role of the artist, Heinich (1998) analysed artists through the French Revolution to more contemporary times, and she concludes that the role of the artist has changed radically over time. She demonstrates how artists have changed and shifted within different regimes in order to replace the aristocrats who lost their position of privilege during the revolution, because elite status is no longer assumed through birth, but is instead achieved through merit and talent. Heinich (1998) charts this shift through different regimes, describing how artists now occupy the regime of vocation which means that the artist is no longer conceptualised as an artisan or craftsperson, rather they are a creator by vocation and their products, their artwork, is expected to be unique and innovative. Because this regime of artist has come to replace

aristocrats, this shift in regimes is argued to be democratic. However, Heinich (1998) argues that this regime is defined by singularity which is in opposition to the world of artists and therefore not democratic in nature. For Heinich (1998), this interpretation serves to question value systems more broadly, noting how within modern societies the field of art is only one area that has experienced such a tension between notions of excellence and equality.

There is a political underpinning to Heinich's (1998) theorisations, in that she engages with ideas of how inequality appears to be rooted within democratic systems, particularly given the necessity for modern societies to include privileged elites. The field of art then is noticeable as an example of what can be the result of contradictory value systems existing within the same social context. Where Heinich's (1998) epistemic standpoint means that she herself does not subscribe to a particular value system, this prompts her to question the values of sociology as it pertains to the study of art. Danko (2008, 248) notes how Heinich's (1998) work 'is in fact also a work of political sociology for it questions the place of excellence and singularity in a democratic society based on the value of equality'.

Moving away from Zolberg's (1990) suggestion of incorporating both micro and macro approaches to the study of art, Heinich (1998) proposes an internal only position which studies art from the approach of what art does to sociology, flipping the sociological tradition of what sociology does to art (Zolberg, 1990). By working to overthrow the tensions present between sociology and the arts, Heinich (1998) promotes an epistemic change and paradigm shift, moving away from the sociology *of* art to the sociology *from* art. Doing this would direct sociological inquiry into the uniqueness of artists and their work. Heinich (1998) favours an interpretivist approach which rejects the sociological study of art objects themselves, preferring to interpret the representations, actions, and interactions of artists with other social actors related to the field. This is the basis of her methodological critique of sociology, rejecting the value of revealing and critiquing structures of domination. Through this work she distances her own approach from that of Bourdieu's critical sociology, and instead leans towards the sociology of criticism which requires an inductive, pragmatic, and interpretive approach to doing sociology.

According to Heinich (1998), sociologists should work to describe how value systems are defined, constructed, and reconstructed by actors, rather than aiming to reveal the structures of that value system. In emphasising this epistemic shift in how sociology can and should study the arts, Heinich's (1998) most controversial idea is her categorical refusal to include works of

art in any analysis or interpretive work. Although Danko (2008) points towards two ways in which Heinich (1998) does include works of art: through a pragmatic perspective which describes what art does as opposed to what it means, and through the use of work as documentary materials, the sentiment of her statements in this sense are to make clear that sociologists are not, and should not, be art critics, so should not study from the epistemic position which makes value judgements on artworks themselves. Heinich (1998) conceptualised much of her work within French sociology, and wrote predominantly during the 'quarrel of contemporary art' (Danko, 2008, 250) which dominated French theorising of art during the 1990s. This debate saw two opposing ideas about art, those who understood contemporary art as too heavily commercial, and those who viewed this type of criticism as conservative. So, whilst her ideas appear not to be so influential in the grand narrative of the sociology of art, her arguments must be heard in context. By making attempts to position sociology as a discipline that can encourage social actors to better understand each other through engaging in describing their value systems rather than disputing the values of others, she sought to provide a route out of the debate entirely (Danko, 2008). From this epistemic position, the methodologies used to approach art from a sociological perspective would not be valuable or accurate enough to properly study the uniqueness associated with art. As such, Heinich asserts that sociologists should reinvent methods in order to analyse the world of art from within its regime of uniqueness rather than from a position of regularity.

This paradigm shift towards sociology from art has been met with criticism. Although Heinich proposed a paradigm shift in order to solve the incompatibility between sociology and the arts by incorporating the social construction of art and the artistic viewpoint alone, her disregard for artworks themselves brought about disagreement within the field. Serrao (2017) argues that artworks can be a legitimate source of knowledge for sociological study because they are interpretations of particular social realities. This follows from Zolberg (1990) who points to how by neglecting to incorporate the artwork into analytic frameworks, sociologists run a risk of being too reductive with their approach to art worlds.

In avoiding a reductive approach, a proposed 'New Sociology of Art' (de la Fuente, 2007, 409) emerged which asks questions of the traditional approaches to the sociological study of art. These questions are engaged in considering the extent to which the sociology of art is a fundamentally different approach to that of art history or aesthetics and philosophy. Moreover, this new sociology of art also questions how a sociology of art can possibly ignore artwork itself and focus only on the context of which the piece exists. The new sociology of art is an

attempt to consolidate the distinct sociological approach to art whilst also recognising that a productive dialogue between sociology and other disciplines can generate new types of sociological knowledges about art. Engaging in dialogue with other disciplines such as art history and aesthetics can benefit sociology of art by allowing the analysis of artworks to be studied sociologically. Therefore, a new sociology of art would engage with both the aesthetic value of artwork whilst also paying attention to the social contexts in which they are produced and consumed.

This thinking is furthered by Eyerman (2016) and McCormick (2015) who work from a nonreductive stance which helps to make shifts within the field. Their work moves beyond the epistemic dichotomies between a standpoint from the work of artists and a standpoint of the audience. This position makes an important contribution to the sociology of art in that it presents artworks as agentic objects themselves. Placing art into a sociological analysis does not mean, as Alexander and Bowler (2018, 327) argue:

> A return to the reification of the work of art as transcendent, free-floating object or artist as isolated genius; the production and experience of aesthetic-cultural objects are always rooted in time and place, as are discourses on art at a given historical juncture. Placing meaning at the centre of sociological analysis underscores the argument that the sociology of art cannot be limited to institutional analysis alone

In their empirical case study of the nude in late 19th century art they conclude that a full sociological analysis can only be fully realised when artwork itself is included in that analysis.

Janet Wolff (1981) makes a specific case for understanding artwork through its sociological context and framework. In her seminal text, *The Social Production of Art*, she provides what I would suggest is an underpinning for the development of a new sociology of art as described by de la Fuente (2007). Wolff does this by making the case that the arts have to be understood as historically and socially situated and produced, and not as descending from creative genius. Art is inherently a social product which emerges from within social structures and is embedded within cultural relations. Throughout her discussions, Wolff (1981) argues that art is a very complex construction of numerous social and historical factors. Not only is art embedded within social structures, but it actively constitutes them too, beyond representing social life, art and artists produce social life through ideological structures which organises social relations. She describes how the discipline of sociology has historically made a clear distinction between structure and agency, allowing art to sit within the realm of aesthetics, and of subjective creator.

Wolff (1981) draws attention to this divide, and exposes how the artist as a subject has historically never been understood as someone who is themselves constituted within an ideological process. She argues that replacing the language around art and artist with terms such as cultural product and cultural producer, encourages us to conceptualise art as something which is situated socially and culturally. Placing art within the social sphere of culture also promotes the mutual interdependence between structure and agency, where cultural producers are no longer bound to being understood as the effect of structure with no agency, nor are they conceived of as articulations of individualised creative genius. Similarly, cultural products are also highlighted to be complex products of changing economic, social, and ideological factors rather than ahistorical, transcendent, universal fact positioned as unanalysable.

Although constructing a clearly defined sociology of art, Wolff (1981) does not diminish the role of aesthetics in theorising art. A sociology of art must pay attention to both the study of practices and institutions, as well as the study of aesthetics. In section 2.3 I will explore the notion of aesthetics in more depth, particularly focusing on feminist theorising of aesthetics and feminist art history. Reviewing Wolff's (1981) work here lays the groundwork for this following section and underlines the importance of thinking through aesthetics to conduct a sociological analysis throughout the project. Returning to Wolff (1981), she argues that sociology has much to offer the field of aesthetics. Sociology can expose that there is nothing sacred about the aesthetic realm, noting that the opposite is true, in that sociology articulates the historical construction of the very discipline of aesthetics. Whilst sociology has much to say regarding the epistemic position of the field of aesthetics, Wolff (1981) urges that art and aesthetics are not simply reduced into one another to form a sociology of art, rather she suggests that we view art and aesthetics as two distinct fields which each have historical significance but that also share a contingent realm. Aesthetics are therefore not bound to the social or the ideological, but they also do not sit independent of social or ideological positions either. Wolff (1981) argues that aesthetics is tied to value judgements, but these values are embedded within social, political, and ideological value systems, so there cannot be a possible pure aesthetic consciousness. What sociology can do here, is accentuate its critique of value-freedom that aesthetics promotes and that characterises much of art history. A sociological focus can, in this sense, allow us to see how 'art always encodes values and ideology, and that art criticism itself, though operating within a relatively autonomous discourse, is never innocent of the political and ideological processes in which that discourse has been constituted' (Wolff, 1981, 143).

The sociology of art in this way develops a perspective on cultural production which is inclusive of producers, consumers, and the products themselves.

Wolff (1981) subscribes to a theorising of culture which focuses on activities such as literature, music, and the visual arts in order to illuminate the ways in which the arts are embedded within the social world. In this sense, she argues for the understanding of art as something that is deeply entwined with social life. Similarly to Becker (2008) and Bourdieu (1993), Wolff (1981) subscribes to a distinctive vision of a sociological study of art, enrobing art practices, the audience, artists, and artwork into a study of cultural and social life, rather than viewing art as a unique experience sitting outside of culture.

Hanquinet and Savage (2016) champion the idea that the sociology of culture, as a discipline, should be concerned with both the aesthetic and the social. In avoiding an approach that sees the sociology of culture as a small and specific sub-discipline of sociology which is concerned with literature, music, or art respectively, they advocate for a sociology of the arts which will integrate everyday experiences of arts into a wider theorisation of cultural and sociological concerns. As such, art is placed within the broader sphere of social and cultural contexts, which simultaneously explicates artwork from itself and underscores the importance of social relations within the arts more generally. Hanquinet and Savage (2016) argue that aesthetics is constantly implicated in, and emerges from, social interactions and relationships. They suggest that a sociological approach to arts and culture allows us to move away from traditional theorisations of the individual artist and individual works of art, and into a reflexive and fluid understanding of the interconnectedness of social life and culture.

Whilst the arts can be understood as a core component within discourse on social and cultural life, and it is possible to approach art through its context in the social, this does not simply mean that the arts are not an institutional force within social life. There remain distinctions within social life between the arts and popular culture, and this contributes to the ways in which culture structures social relations. Williams (1956, 1985) outlined a foundational account of the construction of high culture. He details how the concept of culture emerged from the challenges associated with industrialisation, art was heralded as a counterbalance to increasing urbanisation. Culture served as a distinctive sacred realm, a critical reaction to the growth of capitalism and market principles. The emergence of high culture through this distinction signified a superior form of culture, and as such became institutionalised. Cultural institutions such as galleries and museums furthered the institutionalisation of highbrow arts, or high

culture, within society (Levine, 1990). This being said, the boundaries between art and popular culture have blurred because of the connections that have been drawn between the themes of premodern fine art and popular mass culture such as emotionalism, violence and eroticism (Duncum, 2014). This blurring of boundaries is perhaps most noticeable when looking into art institutions and spaces. Returning to some ideas from Bourdieu, museums and galleries are considered to be sacred spaces, symbolic beacons of high culture, where the architecture and the display settings are symbolic of high culture which can be distinguished from popular culture. However, museums and galleries have changed drastically to allow for greater access to such spaces, making art spaces political institutions of education. The coding of art spaces as both high culture and sites of moral betterment (Duncan, 1995) is something that Bourdieu and Darbel (1991) conceptualised, arguing that although art museums can be free and open access, this does not mean that people from lower classes will attend. For Bourdieu and Darbel (1991) the low attendance was testament to lower classes not having the cultural capital necessary to decode gallery spaces. Instead, they found these spaces daunting and the exhibits irrelevant. Whilst these ideas of museum spaces still account for some experiences, it is important to broaden the scope of art spaces.

Prior (2005) observes the emergence of a newer middle class, for example, with a much more postmodern conceptualisation of visual culture. This means that the boundaries of what is high culture and what is popular culture are less fixed and stable. Wynne and O'Connor (1998) suggest that urban regeneration and anesthetisation have promised city space as both consumer playground and heavily gentrified residential space, which facilitates the consumption practices of an emerging and a growing middle class which meshes high and low culture, destabilising the boundaries between notions of class and cultural capital. This blurring of boundaries allows a meshing of the aesthetic and the commercial, so much so that art then becomes a factor of commercial life and is less of an aesthetic institution and more of a consumerist and commercial one.

 Highlighting this concept, Joy et al (2014) explored how luxury brand stores become art institutions. They produce the concept of the 'M(Art) World', which defines 'a market that contains art within its very identity' (Joy et al, 2014, 347). The focus is on luxury fashion brand Louis Vuitton, looking at how these luxury stores are becoming increasingly hybrid institutions, part shop and part gallery. The relationship between fashion and art are historical and well documented, with debates around if fashion, clothing and its design and production in particular, can be considered art. This is due to fashion being popularly understood as

superficial and driven by the consumerism inherent to popular culture (Mores, 2006). This is considered to be in direct opposition to fine art, which is viewed as classic, timeless, and elitist (Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013). Samborska (2017) understands the relationship between fashion and art to be that of other/identical where fashion has historically been considered the *other* of art, due to it being perceived as lacking substance despite the skills and practical rigour demonstrated throughout the design and production of fashion. This perception, coupled with the notion that fashion is intrinsically commercially motivated, mean that art worlds and fashion worlds have existed in separate categories where art is the more noble enterprise with longevity, and fashion is the commodity fuelled by popular culture and constant cycles of production and consumption (Oakley Smith and Kubler, 2013).

However, as Gregory (2014) importantly notes, the dualistic relationship between the same-but-different worlds has always been commercially lucrative. More recently there has been a very public and overt fusion between art and fashion. Art galleries and museums are increasingly keen to curate exhibitions focused on fashion designers of luxury brands. As well as this, artists are collaborating with fashion houses to stage performances; performance artist Vanessa Beecroft created a performance piece for a Louis Vuitton store opening in Paris whereby models were placed on the shelves next to the designer products. This type of performance makes the lines between art and marketing, and consumption and appreciation much more ambiguous than ever before. In this view, Samborska (2017) concludes that the *other* has now got a clear advantage over the identical, that art needs the fashion industry in order to appeal to a vast consumer culture. Whilst this provides an exciting view of the ongoing relationship between art and fashion, it is also important to explore the social and cultural elements of this merging of spaces and worlds.

As Schroeder (2002) notes, consumer culture has become a visual culture, where the need to combine aesthetics with the mundane is of growing importance especially within the luxury brand industry. Joy et al (2014) conducted an ethnographic study in a Louis Vuitton flagship store and found that customers routinely experienced the physical space of the store as a gallery space. Through the architecture of the space, often designed by high profile interior designers, the light installations that are part of the finish of the stores, the 'wasted space' of the stores, and the displaying of products that are for sale next to commissioned artworks, all create the sensory experience of being in a museum. Everything within the space is presented as art, as an experience with aesthetic value, but the context has changed. Now, these values are enshrined in the branding of luxury. Art is therefore central to the structure of luxury branding,

luxury stores become art institutions through the consumption of space as well as products, and the blurring of what is consumable. This is not a new concept, the retail industry has used visual merchandising to inscribe products with values in order for them to appear more desirable since the nineteenth century (Featherstone, 1991; Parker, 2003). Luxury brands need to sell more than their products in order to thrive within the market, they need to sell their brand, and aim to sell an experience to their customers. It is this sense of experience that blurs the boundary between luxury brand products and art. The experience of the stores, and the commodities themselves take on a symbolic role of signifiers of wealth and taste (Berthon, 2009), which leads Okonkwo (2007) to note that luxury *is* art. Looking to marketing literature has been useful in understanding the very explicit consumerist merging of art and popular culture, but this focuses specifically on luxury brands, and whilst this provides an interesting reading into culture and class, perhaps the more appropriate line of enquiry for this project is a more feminist understanding of art and visual culture, as this points towards a narrower focus on how gender is structured within art worlds.

In this section I have reviewed the sociology of art as a discipline, and mapped major developments and trends within the field. Most notably from this discussion is the argument that art is a social practice which is embedded within social, political, and cultural relations. For example, Becker (2008) and Wolff (1981) position art as something inherently social, removing the connotation of the artists as an individual sitting outside of social life. Whilst much of the work here focuses on the discipline of sociology, on how it is possible and productive to think sociologically about art, I have also pinpointed structural inequalities that have been studied within the field. Much of Bourdieu's work, for example, highlights how class is organised through the concept of taste, and how this is practiced through art institutions. Each of these approaches make a significant contribution to understanding how a sociology of art can conceptualise structural inequalities, and I have drawn from Zolberg (1990) and de la Fuente (2007) to evaluate the usefulness of these approaches for this particular project. With this, I have constructed a space for this research within this discipline, working from this sociological position and extending it to encompass women's contemporary experiences of digital art practice.

For my research, although class is undoubtedly an intersecting factor in understanding gender, the focus lies in gendered experiences. Therefore, the following section will discuss literature with an explicit focus on gender in relation to art in order to build on the foundation that the sociology of art provides. To do this, I will look to feminist art history and the critiques that it

makes of art historical narratives. I will also look to feminist aesthetic theories to further articulate a position for this project to stand within and work from. Art history and aesthetics have been referred to throughout this first section, and the following section will pick up on these ideas and highlight their importance to the foundations of this research, placing gender at the forefront of developing a feminist sociology of art.

2.3 Feminist art history & aesthetics

Linda Nochlin's (1988) radical essay, *Why Are There No Great Women Artists?*, called attention to art history and in doing so, reshaped the feminist project happening within the arts at the time. Nochlin (1988) understood that social institutions, including galleries and museums, had limited women's access to any type of formal training in the arts. Not only this, but she also argued that social attitudes had constructed women as passive and subservient, meaning that this further restricted access to art. Her argument stands as provocative because she declared that there simply had not been any great women artists because of this lack of institutional and social access to art spaces, and this argument seemingly worked against feminist protest at the time which sought to unearth forgotten names and stories of women artists as a way of reclaiming art history. As feminism at the time worked to resist the notion that there had been no great women artists, Nochlin (1988) did not resist, but offered a critique of the institution itself. Her essay is positioned as a starting point to begin critiquing the ideology of art history as a discipline. This work unlocked the canon for feminist thinking in relation to art, by incorporating gender into its critical analysis of art history, feminism had the power to then move forward with shifting the paradigm to develop an account of institutional hegemony.

Further challenging traditional art historical ways of knowing, Parker and Pollock's (2013) crucial critique offers an understanding of art historical narratives as inherently sexist. They argue that the ways in which art history is written ignore much artistic work produced by women. Within the twentieth century there has been an overwhelming silence on the artistic pursuits and activities of women, and the ways that this narrative is written as a discipline gives the impression that women have always been absent from the cultural and artistic sphere. They suggest that despite an actual increase in women making art during the twentieth century, there remains a common assumption that art, and culture more broadly, is a sphere dominated by men and masculine ideals. As such, they understood art history as a discursive formation whereby the privileged discourses surrounding art serve a symbolic purpose of that value and reproduce Eurocentric and patriarchal ideology, and that this discourse is embedded within and

maintained through the institutions of both museums and the academy. In this way art, as both object and narrative, becomes synonymous with western masculine epistemology.

Whilst highlighting how women's creative pursuits have been largely ignored by art history, Parker and Pollock (2013) urge that this is too simplistic a reading of the field, and argue that a more thorough questioning of the field of art as a male dominated sphere is needed. Throughout their work, they explore how the term 'artist' has become synonymous with masculinity and with this, notions of greatness and genius. Offering the alternate in the binary of sex, woman becomes synonymous with constructions of femininity. Although femininity is located and lived within embodied women's lives, femininity in its relationship to power is experienced through institutions and through structures which exclude femininity from the realm of dominance. This type of dominance, they argue, generates power through exclusions of the spheres of dominance within art institutions. Power operates through 'the discursive systems through which the world we live in is represented by and to us' (114).

Our access to these discursive systems produces ways of knowing about ourselves and our abilities to use the discourses of particular cultures serves to maintain the boundaries of that culture. As such, Parker and Pollock (2013) determine that language and discourse is never neutral, rather:

> 'the language of a particular culture prescribes in advance positions from which to speak: language is not a neutral vehicle for expression of pre-existent meanings but a system of signs, a signifying practice by which meaning is produced by the positioning of a speaker and receiver. Furthermore, language embodies symbolically the laws, relations and divisions of a particular culture. Thus, while language is the means by which we speak ourselves and communicate to others, on a deeper level it also controls what can be said, or even thought, and by whom' (114).

Therefore, the exclusion to art spaces that women face constitutes the ways in which women can speak and represent themselves, as this is managed through representations and through culture.

This concept of culture as a discursive system of power is also articulated by Shulamith Firestone (1979) who argued that women have an indirect relationship to culture. She suggests that women inspire culture, in that the muse was always female. She argues that women produce the conditions for culture to exist, women are in direct contact with their lived experiences whereas men are wrapped up in the process of reproducing reality so therefore

cannot live it as women do. Firestone (1970) asserts that where women have contributed to culture as a producer rather than as inspiration, they have had to produce their work on male terms because they have to compete as males. This is because culture is determined from a masculinised perspective, the view of women is a view shaped by men, so women cannot necessarily achieve an authentic picture of their own realities through culture and cultural practices.

Returning to Janet Wolff's (1990) work, in her text *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, she too discussed the ways in which women have been absent from most accounts of sociological analysis of culture. However, unlike Firestone's assertation that women cannot conceive of an authentic definition of their own reality within the cultural sphere, writing mainly about literature Wolff (1990) suggests that through the process of writing, women can literally write themselves into culture by defining their own particular lives and identities from within a patriarchal culture. She argues that what is defined as women's art depends on ideas about women's knowledge, and that any exploration of how women can write themselves into culture must stem from a discussion of aesthetics and epistemology. In essence, her argument is that there cannot be textual analysis without a sociological analysis, and she highlights this in her critique of earlier feminist writing.

Wolff (1990) traces feminist work in cultural studies, outlining how feminism has highlighted the ways in which production, representation, and reception of the arts is masculinised within a patriarchal culture. From this position of exclusion, she considers the possibility of a different culture defined by, and produced from the standpoint of, women's experiences. She argues that the institutional organisation of knowledge works to marginalise women which reinforces gender inequality throughout society, and that a study of women's engagement with arts must be sociological in so that it can conceptualise the social and cultural context that reinforces a gendered division. The production of knowledge about women and feminist epistemologies will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three, but as I move forward to discuss feminist theories of aesthetics it is worth noting the importance of epistemology to developing a sociological account of digital feminist art practice. Whilst feminist aesthetic theories lay a solid foundation for this research in understanding how gender is negotiated through culture, I remain mindful that this must be in conversation with epistemology in order to produce a feminist sociology.

Many feminist writers have rejected the notion that a specific feminist aesthetic exists (see for example Felski, 1989; Nochlin 1988). In this sense, it is important both within the discipline more broadly and within my research, to distinguish between feminist aesthetics as a concept itself, and the concept of *A* feminist aesthetic based on ideas of a specific female sensibility (Garber, 1992; see also Mercedes, 1998). Feminist aesthetics then, refers to the ways in which feminism has allowed a lens to reconceptualise aesthetic inquiry. Feminist theory highlights the historical and social contexts which inform and shape classic tenets of aesthetics such as quality, form, and beauty. Feminist aesthetic theory promotes the idea that art is not gender neutral, rather gender does affect how art is produced and understood. Moreover, Mercedes (1998) argues that feminist aesthetic theory highlights how art objects themselves do not have an inherent value, but that value is constructed through a masculinised western culture and aesthetic tradition. So, feminist aesthetic theory reconceptualises and constructs new ways of knowing about the production of art, the art object, and the artist by challenging and reconfiguring masculinist language and culture surrounding art. In this way, aesthetic value is formulated around context, meaning, and relations between social actors.

This reconceptualization of masculinist aesthetic value is not only theoretical or epistemological, but it is embodied in feminist artistic practice as well. Traditions of feminist art are built upon seeking to challenge the exclusion of women's perspectives and experiences from art worlds, by reconfiguring patriarchal and masculinist depictions of women in art which contribute to the stereotype of women as always sexual, always passive. Furthermore, feminist art aims to reconfigure these stereotypical representations by constructing representations of women that parody traditional representations, reframing them with a feminist consciousness, or by deconstructing the ideals of femininity as valued by a masculinist tradition within art. This is particularly present within representations of the body, which makes for a large proportion of feminist art.

Garber (1992) outlines how through the application of feminist theory to philosophy, traditional notions of aesthetics such as objectivity were able to be challenged from a critical perspective. She organises the work of feminist thinkers in aesthetics into three major ways of thinking for establishing a feminist aesthetic that have been present within feminist theorising of aesthetics: female sensibility, a criterion to evaluate art, and responses to art by viewers.

Firstly, Garber identifies female sensibility as central to constructing a feminist aesthetic. Female sensibility emerges from the questioning of if there is a specific type of art that women

make. Lucy Lippard (1976) initially posed this question, and she subsequently suggested that art by women often engages with a central focus in the form of circles or ovals to signify emptiness, a clear autobiographical emphasis, and sensuous forms. This visual form of expression of difference from a masculinist view represents attempts by feminist artists, particularly from the 1970s, to reimagine traditional depictions of women in art and embed a specific female subjectivity into artworks. Central core imagery, or vaginal iconography, depicted using circles and ovals as described by Lippard (1976) offered a radical feminine aesthetic that was obviously defiant to a patriarchal art world. Moore (2013) discusses changes that have happened within feminist aesthetics, and outlines how central core imagery was used to define women's work as something markedly different from men's, and that this style creates a framework which can allow for a reversal of the ways that women are seen within culture more broadly. In establishing the very thing that marks women as different to men, and thus making their work less valuable, vaginal iconography establishes an ownership and centring of difference, of the ways of being in the world as women. Vaginal iconography is often understood and categorised as erotic art, but critic Barbara Rose (1974) argued that it is not necessarily about sexual desire or pleasure at all, and instead it is about challenging the ways in which women are medicalised and pathologized within society. She goes on to conclude that vaginal imagery used throughout the 1970s feminist art movement was effectively propaganda for sexual equality.

Whilst much of this work at the time was not framed around overt sexuality, Middleman (2013) directs attention to Hannah Wilke's sculptures which dealt with female sexuality before the rise of the feminist art movement. Middleman (2013) argues that Hannah Wilke's sculptures defied traditional erotic art aesthetics which had previously been defined by men, and that her work constituted a radical feminist critique of heterosexuality. She challenged the aesthetic conventions of sexuality as well as gender. This destabilisation through the sculptures challenged assumptions about women because it was produced from the experiences of women and generated alternative ways of visualising sexuality from women's perspectives. Hannah Wilke created sexually ambiguous sculptures, where they can be read as androgynous sexual forms. Middleman (2013) points to how this sexual ambiguity created by a woman destabilised the foundations of erotic aesthetics as this usually emphasised the female body as an erotic object of desire. In creating erotic work that defied the binaries between male/female and phallic/vaginal, she queers the notions of the erotic as it relates to both aesthetics and also the ordering of heterosexual social relations.

Whilst this search for a female sensibility within art production and consumption highlighted the masculinist and patriarchal perspective in much of art history and art criticism, it was challenged due to its essentialising nature. Waugh (1990) argues that working from the position of female sensibility only reinforces binary categories which reinforces, rather than challenges, a dichotomy of opposites in males and females. A female sensibility, she warns, reinscribes traditional ways of being a woman. Raven (1987) argues that a female sensibility can be useful without reinforcing prescriptive gender roles through being consciously introduced as a direct challenge to the ways that art worlds value the experiences of men over women. The idea of consciousness is important here as it points to a feminist politics which has the potential to disrupt traditional narratives. In this sense, the characteristics of women's art do not necessarily speak to ideas about nature, but they do speak to a certain political consciousness surrounding sexual difference in art.

Ecker (1985) arrives at similar conclusions, and makes a clear distinction between a female sensibility that would describe all women's artistic characteristics and feminist approaches to creating art that are imbued with a conscious feminist politics. In this sense, through a conscious engagement with feminist politics, a female sensibility can be understood as a way that feminist artists can construct a feminist aesthetic that poses a challenge to traditional ways of knowing. Furthermore, Robinson (1995) argues that the feminine, whilst it is part of experiencing the body, is not essential to the body, but rather the feminine is mediated through the body and through representations of the body. So even in the cases of vaginal iconography where there is a direct relationship to female biology and femininity, the artworks that were produced are in themselves representations which exist outside of the body. As such, the meanings of these representations of femininity expressed through a marked sexual difference to men are malleable and fluid, existing as a representation of an experience and not necessarily a representation of biological determinism.

Another way that feminist art constructs a specific aesthetic is through contesting traditional artistic aesthetics grounded in notions of beauty and pleasure. Meagher (2003) outlines an aesthetics of disgust which she argues challenges conventional representations of beauty that pervade embodied experiences and everyday lives of women. With a direct focus on the artist Jenny Saville's work, Meagher (2003) suggests that the bodies that Saville depicts are completely different to the bodies that are valued as aesthetically beautiful because they transcend the refined and evenly proportioned representations of the female nude seen in traditional painting. The female nude, particularly in painting, is emblematic of high culture

and a classic aesthetic of beauty whereby the body is depicted as 'ideal, perfect, the object of contemplation and delectation' (Nead, 1990, 333). As discussed previously in the section focused on feminist art history, Nead (1990) understands the female nude as both at the centre and the margins of high culture because she occupies a space of taste within art historical discourse where the nude epitomises Renaissance idealism, but also sits upon the boundary of pornography, so is always under threat of crossing that boundary. Within art historical discourses, the nude acts as a paradigm of western high culture which values aesthetic pleasure. Returning to Meagher (2003), this aesthetic pleasure is challenged through the distortion of bodies that Saville paints. She argues that Saville's work provokes the emergence of an aesthetics of disgust that generates different and newer ways of thinking about feminine embodiment, particularly focusing on the problem of experiencing the self as a site of disgust.

In setting out to disrupt the classical style of the female nude, Saville paints large scale distorted bodies with unsettling proportions. According to Meagher (2003) this unsettling, unnerving and visceral difficulty with confronting Saville's work is crucial to the formulation of an aesthetics of disgust. She argues that disgust has a physicality which offers an opportunity to pay closer attention to the body, which can serve as a reminder of how women embody social contexts and cultural expectations set out by representations. In representing a certain type of femininity, one that is embedded within cultures of aesthetic beauty framed by the binary of beautiful and disgusting, Meagher (2003) argues that Saville represents the disparity between how women feel about their bodies and how their bodies are perceived by others. Milner (1997, 4) articulates this same idea through asserting that Saville paints bodies that are 'the feminine idea of the feminine' meaning that an aesthetics of disgust begins from the subjectivity of experiencing the body as a woman embedded within visual culture. In this way, an aesthetics of disgust reverses the classic female nude grounded in the passive display of the body for aesthetic pleasure for a masculinist audience. This makes disgust part of a clearly defined feminist aesthetic particularly for Meagher (2003) who concludes that disgust, because of its social, physical, and subjective meanings, works well for developing a feminist aesthetic because it both challenges tradition whilst simultaneously providing opportunities to explore something other than beauty or purity as they relate to representations of the body.

Secondly, Garber (1992) outlines how the criteria for evaluating art is an important theme in thinking through feminism and aesthetics. She discusses how the criteria for evaluating art are not universal nor are they neutral in their value judgements. These criteria used to define which art is good and which is bad represent the specific tastes and values of a small section of social

life, and this usually comprises of a masculine social elite. Devereaux (1990) argues that there needs to be a willingness to reconsider and rethink the values that are held in order to make evaluations, and a willingness to understand and critique why value is placed on those particular criteria. She points out how gender must be a factor in the consideration of evaluation criteria and this can be seen in how painting is a medium perceived to have a higher value than textile work, which is valued only as craft (Silvers, 1990). Garber (1992) goes on to conclude that the criteria for defining the value of art has been overlooked when considering art made by women from within the context of women's lives. In this way, the value placed on art should be inclusive of the context in which it was produced and consumed rather than a purely aesthetic evaluation which stems from a patriarchal social elite.

The response of the viewer is the third area that Garber (1992) discusses in relation to major trends within feminist aesthetic theory. Devereaux (1990) notes how art audiences are always gendered, and that the viewing of art can never be neutral because of this. The work done within feminist aesthetics allows an understanding of how viewers respond to pieces of art, as well as how these responses shape understandings of, and reactions to, women in social life. The most notable study into understanding the viewer and their responses is John Berger's (1972, 47) *Ways of Seeing*. In his third chapter focusing on representations of women in art, he argues that 'men act and women appear' which symbolises the theory of the male gaze. This simplification of his ideas refers to the ways in which women are always represented as passive bodies which are surveyed by men, they are defined by their ways of being looked at as opposed to being the person who looks. Within this, he suggests that women who view art or representations of women, begin to view themselves as an object in that same way that men view them. Women are continuously presented with images of their own gender, and so this means that women look upon themselves as men do, regulating their bodies in ways that meet a standard set by a male gaze. Berger (1972) argues that women must continuously watch themselves because from childhood they have been encouraged to survey themselves in a way that objectifies them. This reproduction of a binary between men and women, surveyor and surveyed perpetuates a dominant social order where one position is privileged over another. Devereaux (1990) asserts that this male gaze acts as a mechanism of oppression which elevates men to the more superior status of spectators, meaning that they will always hold an objectifying gaze over women.

Laura Mulvey's (1975) essay entitled *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* is useful to discussions here. Her essay theorises viewer responses to film, and ultimately argues that film has been produced with the pleasure of a male viewer in mind. This text works to expose and

understand how patriarchal society structures film, and how this contributes to a dichotomy whereby women are looked at and men are active in looking at women. She discusses the symbolic order, which rests upon the idea of natural sexual difference that attributes power to men. As such, women become the fundamental object of the gaze. Mulvey discusses the concept of scopophilia, which refers to the ways in which film provides the viewer with a specific pleasure in the act of looking at a person as an object of eroticism. Originally articulated by Freud, scopophilia is focused on a desire to take part in the active process of looking specifically at bodily areas or acts that are considered forbidden, the active looking then transforms the object of the gaze into an object of erotic pleasure. Mainstream film positions the audience within a scopohilic lens, so that they engage with the erotic pleasure in viewing. In applying this theory to the role that women play in film, Mulvey (1975) argues that women are characterised by their to-be-looked-at-ness because they are continuously framed as the object of erotic desire both for the viewing audience and other characters. Men in film provide an active narrative that viewers should identify with, and this means that when viewing film, viewers will take on the gaze of the active male regardless of their own gender. As such, as viewers, we all take on the position of a male gaze.

Writing within the context of feminism's second wave, Mulvey's (1975) work is often considered within academic feminism as a relic of feminist theory, as something that holds historic significance for feminist film theory as somewhat of a manifesto but not something that necessarily has a lasting grip on contemporary visual culture (Fuery, 2017). Boyle (2015) reflects on this thinking, and offers her own thoughts about the usefulness of *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. She asserts that this text should not simply be an institutional memory, instead preferring to consider Mulvey's work as a tool for feminist thinking and 'agitating' (887) now and in the future, allowing second wave texts to be reconsidered and reconceptualised to produce continuous feminist knowledges. Similarly, Mackay (2015) suggests that it is useful to think about feminism's second wave as a set of tools which are continually moving and shifting, where foundational texts are negotiated with contemporary generations. As such, the usefulness of Mulvey's work, and many of the accompanying works in this chapter, to this project is that they offer a tool to think with, and construct different, feminist knowledges.

Although Mulvey's work on the gaze is important in that it provides an account of how viewing art is a specifically gendered experience and thus has influential scope within feminist aesthetics as well as within the social history of art, other scholars reject the assertion that a

female gaze cannot exist. Mulvey (1975) has been criticised for her model of the male gaze being overly simplistic in her discussion of masculinity and femininity, often being accused of relying on essentialist ideas equating men with masculinity and women with femininity. As well as this, she also relied upon a heterosexual framework for her ideas surrounding desire, where this assumed framework may not apply to some spectators who sit outside of this heterosexual framework. Furthermore, Mulvey's (1975) neglect of the specific pleasures that women spectators experience is highlighted as a flaw in her work, as this leaves little space for women's agency within looking (Freeland, 2012).

This question surrounding the existence or possibility of a female gaze was taken up by Jacobsson (1999) who focused on the film *Fatal Attraction* (1987). She argues that *Fatal Attraction* (1987) provides the possibility of a female gaze, but that audience desires read the film in a more traditional way of the male gaze. In constructing this argument, Jacobsson (1999) presents the idea that the object of desire in this particular film is a man, and the viewers experience this desire from the woman's perspective. However, as the narrative develops, the woman gradually becomes the object of desire meaning that the audience can re-establish a dominant social narrative through identifying with a male gaze. Jacobsson (1999) concludes that a female gaze only serves to reinforce a male gaze through the objectification of the very desire a female character might have, she notes that the unconscious pressures of the structural demands of a male gaze mean that the fear of changes in the dichotomy of desire are projected onto representations of women, and managed through women characters being embedded within narratives that force them into the norms of objectification.

Beyond film theory, the idea of a female gaze within visual culture is a troubling and challenging concept. In looking specifically to photography, Jansen (2017) collected stories from multiple women who are photographers to attempt to locate criteria for a specific female gaze. Whilst she presents the idea that being a woman behind the camera offers a femininity that differs from that of a masculinist, voyeuristic viewpoint, this does little to move beyond the binary of male and female. Stacey (1994) argues that if a female gaze is possible, it needs to exist beyond the binary, beyond the erotic fetishization of representations of women. In this way, it is not enough to simply reverse the gaze and apply an erotic lens to men's bodies, rather she emphasises the need for multiple levels of identification with representations of women in order to de-eroticise those depictions. Similarly, Doane (1982) argues that a female gaze cannot have the capacity to participate in the fetishist pleasures in the way that a heterosexual male gaze is set up for. This is because the gap between women as spectators and women as objects

of the gaze cannot be located, the female spectator has an over-presence in an image, for she *is* the image. Returning to Stacey (1994), she concludes that a dependence on psychoanalytic models of the gaze, such as Mulvey's, is actually immobilising for feminists working to locate a female gaze. Overall, she calls for more diversity and more complexity within the concept of the gaze to fully encapsulate women's negotiation with spectatorship beyond psychoanalytic terms.

Taking on this idea of complexity, Izharuddin (2015, 138) distinguishes two main features of a female gaze. Firstly, she proposes that the 'female gaze coheres at the site of the exchange of looks by women that precipitate an event in a dramatic narrative', and secondly, a female gaze can only be possible when it refers to the hypothetical idea of looking, rather than the empirical. In her analysis of horror films, she discerns that the female gaze that operates in horror films provide momentary pleasures of identification with female characters because as a genre, horror permits the exploration and expression of female sexual desire which gives spectators a sense of active agency (see also Williams, 1984). However, Izharuddin (2015) also asserts that this pleasure in the gaze is disrupted by women being presented as abject, and this cuts through the female gaze to perform boundary maintenance work to balance women's sexual transgression with traditional gendered social order.

Blanchard (2020) paints a similarly complex picture of the female gaze in her study of Chinese women's artwork. In seeking to locate and define female subjectivity, Blanchard (2020) points to how the artists that she worked with construct a specific subjectivity arising from their complex negotiation of being women in contemporary social life. In her work she shows her participants to be much more than the objects of a patriarchal voyeuristic male gaze, highlighting their agency as both producers of images as well as their identities beyond the body. For example, one artist works to create a fuller picture of womanhood in her work by focusing on women who are rarely the object of a patriarchal male gaze such as older women, and she also depicts women in their workplaces, underscoring the women's complexities beyond being desirable. Further, Blanchard (2020) focuses on another artist who represents sex workers through her artwork. This artist focuses on how sex workers interact with themselves through presenting their mirror images, of women looking at themselves, so that the spectator of her work sees sex workers as they see themselves as opposed to how men see them. This takes away the element of desire because the gaze is exactly that of the women. Ultimately Blanchard (2020) does not locate a specific female gaze, but she does outline the possibilities for a more complex reading of gender in relation to how viewers respond to art.

In this section I have demonstrated how feminist art history and aesthetics have exposed art as institutionally sexist, and how this has impacted the experiences of women who produce art. Exploring this literature has highlighted the need for feminist theorising within this research because it builds a solid foundation for an exclusive focus on women's experiences within digital art production. Whilst this section has demonstrated the different ways in which feminist art historians have characterised feminist ways of knowing about art, including how art is viewed in gendered ways and how the feminist art movement brought about a specific feminist aesthetic to challenge dominant ways of knowing about women who make art, it is also important for my research to draw attention to the more contemporary contexts in which women produce art. Digital technologies and the rise of the internet have impacted both feminism as a social movement as well as feminist approaches to art production and consumption. In moving on to begin thinking though how the digital shapes feminist art production and aesthetics, in the following section I will outline how feminist artists continue to construct specific feminist aesthetics which are imbued with feminine subjectivity but also speak to a broader framework of technology.

2.4 Feminism, technology, and digital art

As discussed previously, the sociology of art works within a framework of sociology whilst also resisting and challenging that very framework through highlighting the social life of art objects themselves as well as working from the standpoint of artists. Because of these tensions within the field, as discussed in the previous sections, Gilbert (2018) asserts that the sociology of art has much to offer in terms of theorising and interpreting the emergence of a specific digital sociology. She uses the framework of sociology to consider ways of thinking about how the rise of a digital age might impact the ways in which we conceptualise and analyse art and art production. Moreover, she asks the question of how digital art, as a specific medium, reflects the changes caused by a new digital age. In looking to the sub discipline of digital sociology, Gilbert (2018) notes that there are similarities between the sociology of art and digital sociology. Outlining the production of culture approach to art, as well as how art reproduces social structures, Gilbert (2018) presents the notion that the sociology of art provides rich ground on which to develop thinking in relation to digital art practice.

Digital art is a medium with both a contested origin and a contested title. Although the birth of digital art can be understood as stemming from a far-reaching asynchronous history, it is also theorised that digital art emerged from a more structured history of developing technological media such as photography and video (Paul, 2008; Gilbert, 2018). Digital art is also referred to

as new media art which defines the broad spectrum of art that engages with new media technologies, acting as a tool to categorise a whole genre of art (Tribe, 2006). However, Gilbert (2018) asserts that using a general term loses the specificity of the medium, the *digital* aspect. She proposes the use of the term digital art, as this refers specifically to art which has an electronic component such as computer or cybernetic art, and which is also distributed or exhibited in digital spaces. In this way, digital art is associated with computer technologies in the way that it is created using mixed media where it can be distributed and reproduced within digital technologies. Further, Gilbert (2018) asserts that the use of digital art, as a term, has made its way into mainstream art discourses with galleries, art schools, and funding bodies adopting the term.

In *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond*, Christiane Paul (2008) describes how new media art, or digital art, challenges the workings of the traditional art world, even though institutions have taken on the concept of digital art. She suggests that digital artists themselves pose a challenge to traditional ways of working within the arts which ultimately changes understandings and practices surrounding art production. This is because digital artists rarely subscribe to traditional ways of being an artist, which hinges on the notion of the isolated man, instead preferring a more dynamic approach. This causes curatorial challenges as digital art is less about an object, and more about a process of being an artist engaged in production. Whilst recognising that digital art poses a problem for art institutions, Paul (2008) highlights that art institutions have much to learn from digital artists, particularly focusing on process over the objects themselves. Digital art brings to the institution values of collaboration, participation, variability, and customisable dimensions, all of which pose a challenge to traditional ways of knowing about what art is, and the role of the artist in both art worlds and everyday life.

This alternative approach to art mediated through the digital, both in theory and practice, mirrors the impact of feminism and feminist art. As noted in the previous section the direction of art history was upended with feminist theorising, along with Marxist, psychoanalysis, and critical studies, highlighting the binary thinking inherent to traditional art worlds. As Drucker (2013, 5 - 6) outlines:

> The ideological values of artworks were unmasked, their participation in the hegemonic order exposed, their existence as discursive formations, social agents, and desiring machines became as much the topic of discussion as their iconography, style, formal elements, compositional features, or technique had been for an earlier generation

These types of epistemic issues that provoked such a critical challenge for art history can be seen between digital art and traditional art worlds. Although Drucker (2013) argues that in order for a similar shift within the discipline to happen between digital art and traditional art worlds, there must be a clear demonstration of how digital art changes the ways that we can understand art, she urges that new research questions must be asked to fully conceptualise how the digital reconfigures the ways in which it is possible to think about art, artists, and aesthetics.

 In doing this work, Drucker (2013) ultimately grapples with a definition of what exactly a digital art history can be. She provides a definition which stems from a definitive separation of digital art history and digitized art history. Digitized art history refers to an early phase of art making using digital platforms that she argues should be overthrown, and digital art history defines the production of knowledge about technology, which she suggests is the direction that should be taken moving forward. The rhetoric of digital art history is therefore occupied mostly with highlighting the 'disruptive potential of the "digital turn" that has resulted from the opportunities offered by technical advances, computational methods, and digital media for the production of new knowledge' (Rodriguez-Ortega, 2019, 2). This new knowledge asks different questions of art history, and also provides responses to the identified problems of art history such as its inherent biases and assumptions. Overall, this narrative produces a positive reading of technology which implies that technology is progressive in that it gives to us an improved position from which to see more clearly, thus producing better, and different, ways of knowing. Therefore, with the speed of which the digital continues to innovate art making and art knowledges, Drucker (2013) concludes that digital art history is the vital step forward for art history. If art historians do not recognise the gravity of technology's influence of the ways in which art can be known and understood, then she argues that they will have to cede authority on knowledge of digital art to other fields entirely.

Rodriguez-Ortega (2019) also takes on this discussion of the evolution of a digital art history. Whilst recognising the importance of Drucker's (2013) definitional work, she argues that since a post-digital society is more fully realised at her time of writing, this rhetoric needs to be re-examined. She argues that because technology is no longer understood as a disruptive force in the breakdown of binaries surrounding before and after technology, digital art history cannot be known as an entirely positive outcome of the digital turn. The multiple complexities that make up a post digital society mean that lines between digital and non-digital begin to blur and the distinction between them is less apparent and less significant. Because of this, she asserts that we should be focusing questions on what art history means within a post-digital era, rather

than asking the question of what digital art history actually is. The binaries that classify Drucker's (2013) work simply do not pertain to a contemporary experience of technology. In updating Drucker's (2013) questions, Rodrigues-Ortega (2019) proposes the idea of thinking of digital art history as a series of epistemological and methodological shifts from the use of technology as tools of art production, to practices that provoke more of an epistemic challenge. Ultimately, she argues that it is not necessarily technology itself that offers a radical troubling of art history, instead it is the 'process of interpenetration in which some things are retained, some are let go, some are reformulated, and some emerge as new questions. Thus, what we are witnessing is a tension between continuities and discontinuities, sometimes in harmony and other times in conflict' (Rodriguez-Ortega, 2019, 2).

This epistemic dialogue surrounding digital art, and technology more broadly, is reminiscent of narratives around women's relationship to technology. Although digital art may not have completely disrupted art historical knowledges, the relationship between digital spaces and feminism has made significant contributions to broader feminist theory which is foregrounded in the relationship between women and technology. Similarly to Rodriguez-Ortega's (2019) note that technology is set within a particular epistemic context on the level of ideology and narrative, feminist thinking surrounding gender and technology is focused on the binaries inherent to that relationship.

With its origins of use based in military operations, technology in an epistemological sense constructs binaries inherent to feminist critique. Wajcman (2010) charts this critique and draws together the approaches to understanding the links between gender and technology, emphasising the interconnectedness of different feminisms across time. She begins by exploring the role of technology in producing culture, emphasising how women's access to technology has been historically denied in a structural sense. She notes that traditionally technology is assumed to consist of industrial machinery and war weapons, the assumption evading the technologies that are embedded within everyday lives and practices. The way that technology is defined in these terms positions it amongst traditionally male activities and thus masculinises its use. Wajcman (2010) identifies how this masculine view of technology rests upon cultural constructions of gender, which form binary oppositions between culture and nature, rationality and emotions, and masculinity and femininity. These binaries mean that technology's association to masculinity is conceptualised as naturally occurring due to biological sexual differences, and this further privileges masculinity within the dichotomy.

Women, then, are excluded from narratives of technology, as their biological sex means that they are assumed not to possess the skill or attributes necessary to master technology. Feminist scholars such as Cockburn (1983) responded to this culture of technology which is embedded within masculinity. She explores how women have to sacrifice elements of their femininity in order to engage with technology that is coded as masculine. This, along with the ways that children are exposed to technology, and gendered roles within the workplace all contribute to the construction of men as technically competent and able, and women as technically incompetent. As such, Wajcman (2010) highlights a feminist approach to thinking about technology which emphasises the ways that technology shapes culture through social structures and institutions such as education and work, reproducing binaries which perpetuate masculine ideology. She concludes this section by noting how feminist work asserts that women are not the problem, that women are not naturally less capable of working with technology, but that institutions should be reshaped and changed to accommodate women. This perspective emphasises how technology shapes gendered experiences and also how this culture continues to perpetuate binary understandings, continuously reinforcing the primacy of masculinity within the field of technology.

A second way of thinking about the relationship between women and technology is through viewing technology as gendered in itself. Wajcman (2010) outlines how the trajectory of feminist thinking, whilst not linear, shifted from conceptualising technology in a structural sense, to thinking about technology in terms of artefacts themselves. This shift focused on how technology reflects divisions in gender and also the ways in which gender is embedded within technology. In writing about radical feminism, Wajcman (2010) explains how technology can be thought of as part of a patriarchal project of male domination over women. Radical feminists argued that technology, similar to science and medicine, works to control women, so they are opposed to the development of new technologies. Specifically in relation to reproductive technologies for example, Corea et al (1985) argue that reproductive technologies only serve to further control and exploit women's bodies, and that the technology itself enacts male dominance over women's bodies. This exemplifies the fears within 1980s feminism surrounding exploitation particularly of women's bodies and following this Wajcman (2010) acknowledges that there was a push from within feminism to call for technology that focused on women's values rather than men's. Whilst this view is important in considering feminist ideas, it is also necessary to outline that a radical perspective also reinforces a gender binary in that it relies on essentialist ideas surrounding women.

Beyond concerns surrounding the body, socialist feminists focused on the relationship between technology, women, and work. As well as noting how industries construct gender binaries through technology, Cockburn (1985) argues that technology plays a central role in the construction of male power because masculinity is embedded within the machines themselves. This means that the machines of technology are not value free, but they are key to mediating gendered social relations. The machines of technology are therefore shaped socially to the exclusion of femininity, and the exclusion of women. In *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change,* Cockburn (1985) focuses on the contrast between masculine technical abilities, which values skill and analytic thinking, and feminine skills which describe caring and intuition. With technology gendering roles within the workplace, it is possible to see how the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy was consistently reproduced, reinforcing binary thinking.

In returning to discussing the digital, the rise in popularity of the internet through the 1990s brought about different ways of thinking about technology for feminists. Shifting from the pessimism associated with feminist responses to technology in the previous decade, the 1990s were characterised by positivity and enthusiasm surrounding the possibilities for women that the internet provides (Wajcman, 2010). Cyberfeminism surfaced as a space for critical engagement with the interconnectedness of women and the internet, and offered great scope for a sense of liberation for women. Although not quite definable as an object or a movement, cyberfeminism's slipperiness is what gives it its politics, and is why it is so useful to feminism in considering women's relationship to technology and specifically to the internet.

Plant (1997) describes cyberfeminism as an alliance between women and machines, in that she sees a connectedness between women and machines as they both emerge and produce from within a male culture. She notes how this relationship, this intimate connection, is historical as much as it is cultural because women have always been the machine parts of social life through reproduction both biologically and through communications. Similarly, machine technologies, in their traditional use, are the tools which literally build cultures and reproduce workforces. Plant (1997) furthers her argument of this alliance between women and technology by stating that technology can be the foundation of liberation for women. Moreover, the radical spirit in which she develops her argument means that she understands the development of technology as a feminisation of culture itself, whereby technology can be at the forefront of dissolving the gender binary by feminising typically masculine ideals and identities. It is this experimental pursuit of femininity which Plant (1997) understands to be where liberation lies, suggesting

that although we have no real idea of what femininity is, the loss of identity that men have with machines and technology means that femininity must have a part to play in the dissolution of boundaries surrounding gender. As such, Plant's (1997) work offers a blurring of boundaries between both men and women and humans and machines. As Wajcman (2010) observes within Plant's work, where technologies used for industry had a patriarchal power, digital technologies allow a subversion of that very power, locating a space for the dissolution of binaries.

Donna Haraway's (1985) concept of the cyborg plays a crucial role in the field of cyberfeminist thinking which directly and overtly addresses binaries. In looking to the relationship between women and technology, the concept of the cyborg offers a blending between the organic, the human body, and the non-organic, the mechanical and technological. Haraway (1985) notes specifically that this hybrid between technology and the body and between the real and the virtual, is both reality as well as fiction in that it is essentially an illusion. The cyborg then is understood as a powerful political image which highlights how technology is part of what it means to be human, the cyborg represents embodiment which acts as a tool for subverting gender relations. Arguing against the dichotomies between male technology and female nature, Haraway (1985) uses the notion of the cyborg to enact an alternative vision of hybridity, where identities can be foregrounded in the concepts of embodiment and difference. This challenges and destabilises notions of the natural feminine, emphasising how the cyborg can be best understood as a discursive vehicle for subverting dichotomies, objectivity, and rationality.

The cyborg is also a space of pleasure. Because the concept of the cyborg crosses boundaries between culture and nature, public and private, and men and women, it makes a postgenderness possible. Haraway (1985) notes how cyborg feminists must work from the position that there is no unity and no essentialism at all, and instead argue that possibilities for identity exist only within fractured and frayed accounts of identities. It is these fragments that exist only within embodied subjectivities, that can produce a reconstitution of bodies that are free from the constraints of constructed, rigid gender binaries. The fluidity inherent to this articulation is where pleasure is located for Haraway (1985), who urges that cyborgism is a weaving of eroticism and politics from the imagery of embodiment, so that bodies can be reconstituted.

Cyberfeminist ideas, particularly the radical potential of liquefying the boundaries between technology and organism, have been prevalent in feminist art. Returning briefly to Plant (1996), it is necessary to underscore the importance of cyberfeminist theory in foregrounding

discussions surrounding art production here as it bridges feminist theory with feminist art practice. The two are not only linked by a feminist politics, but Plant (1996) argues that they also emerge from the same subversive energy. As cyberfeminists work to counteract and challenge power structures inherent to technology, she suggests that this is done in the same way that women artists work consciously with ideas of replication and simulation to subvert traditional representations. Digital media are sites where this meshing of cyberfeminist politics and feminist aesthetics emerge. Further, Kuni (1997, 13) offers a definition of cyberfeminism that incorporates Plant's (1996) ideas, in her definition she proposes 'cyberfeminist practice as both a political and aesthetic strategy', adding that cyberfeminist practice is a strategy that works consciously with modes of replication and simulation instead of simply referencing traditional means of representation. In this way, beyond theory and beyond ideas, cyberfeminism is something that is practiced through digital art making. Digital art making takes on the projects of cyberfeminism in its conscious blurring of boundaries.

Way (2016) identifies that from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, artists started to engage with technology as a central focus in their work. In charting the feminist art collective in Australia, VNS Matrix, Way (2016) notes how the group began using the term cyberfeminist to attach their style with their politics, and so cyberfeminist became known to signify both a political affiliation and an artistic identity. Much of their art was embedded within feminist politics which mirror the imaginings of Plant and Haraway as discussed above, particularly surrounding the fluidity of the body and the potential for a genderless utopia through digital spaces. Way (2016) describes how VNS Matrix used an array of aesthetic techniques to engage in feminism through their work, and ultimately trouble binaries. They promoted alternate images of women to replace fetishist representations of women particularly in video games, doing this to draw attention to women's agency and control over their own bodies. In many of their works, VNS Matrix used representations of women's bodies in both text and image to highlight how digital technology is perpetually articulated through the gaze of white heterosexual masculinity.

Similarly, they used an aesthetics of slime to signify the merging of femininity and technology. Where technology, as previously discussed, has historically been associated with masculinity and maleness this created the image of technology as itself masculine, so the internet and gaming in particular was perceived as a sterile environment on the basis that femininity is excluded. However, cyberfeminist artists worked from the basis that women's bodies are sources of disorder and used representations of women's bodies to act as a visual virus, contaminating the internet with feminine embodiment. They aimed, through aesthetics, to

'hack the mainframe of a digital imaginary and insert into its matrix of production, the slime of a fantasised, feminine materiality that might corrode its hygienic operations' (Munster, 2002, 82). In doing this, they demonstrated Haraway's (1985) alliance between femininity and the cyborg to transgress boundaries and reimagine those dichotomies mediated through digital cultures. As Munster (2002) suggests, this strategy of using visceral femininity as a tool of rebellion pushes further towards the dissolution of the technology and human distinction.

Gear (2001) also grapples with the relationship between women artists and technology, and explores the aesthetic and political tactic employed by some feminist artists: the monstrous feminine. Gear (2001) outlines how cyberfeminist thinking is influential in cultivating a relationship between women, art, and technology. She emphasises that artists working on themes of the body and identity often work from within a framework of cyberfeminism because it offers a way of destabilising power within representation, and challenging notions of the fixed body. In developing her ideas on the monstrous feminine as an aesthetic strategy, she situates her work within cyberfeminist narratives as this provides a way of conceptualising the politics of the 'proper/whole body' (Gear, 2001, 321). In analysing work of the artist Linda Dement, Gear (2001) explains how Dement focuses the intention of her art onto contaminating the technology with femininity. She outlines how to do this Dement uses images of visceral, abject female excess which pose a direct challenge to cultural constructions of both women's bodies and the slickness and purity of technology. The materiality of the body is overtly present as a running theme in Dement's work, and the intensity of this materiality threatens to exceed boundaries. Further, Gear (2001) also describes how Dement does not depict whole bodies in her work, rather she cuts and chops up images into parts, creating what Gear (2001, 328) describes as 'corporeal chaos'. Instead of presenting whole, contained bodies, she purposefully ruins and reassembles women's body parts to speak to a broader politics of cyberfeminism. Ultimately, her violent and dangerous images place a visceral materiality into the purity of the internet, contaminating it not only with a monstrous femininity, but also a feminist politics.

Outside of art and aesthetics, cyberfeminist ideas have permeated feminist research into digital cultures both on and offline. Focusing specifically on the ways that cyberfeminist literature has influenced research in relation to online, digital environments, *Cyberspaces of their own: female fandoms online* by Bury (2005) details her ethnographic work with female fandom spaces and tackles debates which emerged from cyberfeminist literature. She discusses the dream of disembodiment which characterises much of cyberfeminist thinking, where digital spaces rendered the body as a physical marker of identity irrelevant. However, Bury (2005)

asserts that if such a disembodiment did exist then this would have seriously limited women's access to and participation in online spaces, particularly online fan forums. Outlining Bury's (2005) work here, although a slight departure from the discussion of cyberfeminism and aesthetics, is useful in that it highlights how any form of engagement that women have with the digital is done through an embodied process of interacting with online spaces as well as other users of that space. In the case of female fandom communities, Bury (2005) notes how the substance of those communities are bound to the repetition of acts that members perform in order to continue their communities, therefore illuminating the notion that for women who engage with technologies, the negotiation of their identities both virtual and physical are mediated through embodiment.

More contemporary research follows from this work and in charting the growing development of digital cultures and feminist participation within them, identifies social media as a space where feminisms can exist both in terms of forming community spaces as well as producing and consuming a specific feminist visual culture which includes feminist art. In this way, social media spaces are increasingly being understood as playing a central role in both feminist activism and the aestheticization of feminism. Crepax (2020) identifies Instagram as a site which hosts discourses of feminist aesthetics particularly pertaining to the body and femininity. She takes a detailed approach in outlining the characteristics of a developing feminist aesthetic happening on Instagram. One characteristic of a contemporary digital feminist aesthetic is what Crepax (2020, 76) calls a girly aesthetic. With this, she refers to an embracement of hyper femininity, including 'rhinestones, glitter, sequins, lace, soft lighting, candy and pastel colours, pretty flowers, princess crowns, dreamy atmospheres and every shade of pink'. She asserts that feminist themes that are dealt with in feminist art such as the body and empowerment are revived within this new aesthetic.

Within this type of reimagining, Crepax (2020) notices that the focus of feminist politics is often situated within the visual. She explains how feminism is mediated on Instagram specifically through a feminist aesthetic as described previously. There is an embodiment of this type of aesthetic too, and Crepax (2020) notes how images of girls and women appear on Instagram to be in line with such an aesthetic. She suggests that one of the values of this new aestheticization of feminism embedded within social media is that there is a reclaiming of hyper femininity as a politicised identity. Where hyper femininity is recast as valid and an identity to be taken seriously, this means that feminist aesthetics on Instagram can be seen as a possibility for subverting the male gaze. Crepax (2020) writes positively about the works of Petra Collins,

who is a feminist artist who is considered 'Insta-famous' (75), remarking that her work pushes towards a much broader and inclusive definition of femininity through creating within this girly aesthetic, which celebrates bodies that do not conform to normative standards of beauty. There is potential in Collins' work, along with other Insta-famous feminist artists who construct a similar aesthetic on their Instagram, to contribute to feminist activisms particularly surrounding the body. This new girly aesthetic then, is central to feminist digital activisms on Instagram and has the potential to redefine femininity outside of dominant western beauty standards.

This being said, Crepax (2020) also points towards the problematic connotations that come from this emergent feminist visibility on Instagram. Whilst the girly aesthetic has political potential for feminist activism as detailed above, Crepax (2020) also notes how this aesthetic carries within it a particular set of inherent contradictions which can be harmful for feminism more broadly. She warns that feminist art that subscribes to this aesthetic is in danger of reproducing harmful and exclusionary narratives. The identification of this girliness, this aesthetic type of femininity, is fuelled by concepts of youth. Many of the digital feminist artists that Crepax discusses, such as Collins and Arvida Byström work from the standpoint of a youthful femininity which emerges from processes of self-imaging and self-representation that is central to digital cultures such as Instagram. In focusing on problems that face young women and girls such as self-esteem, body image, and confidence, Crepax (2020) outlines how this subtly and accidently reproduces associations between desirable femininity and youthfulness. Whilst this aesthetic works to empower young girls and women through an identification with their identities, this type of work can also reproduce harmful discourses which assert that only young women can be desirable. Further, Crepax (2020, 77) explores how this girly aesthetic is usually embodied as a 'woman-child Lolita' which further problematises the aesthetic as it has the potential to betray the often-ambiguous tension between the oppositional reclaiming of youthful feminine sexuality and a patriarchal fixation on the infantilisation of women.

Tensions surrounding the body and women's sexuality are also part of feminist digital activism outside of the aesthetic that Crepax describes. Savolainen, Uitermark, and Boy (2022) discuss how feminist women who use Instagram use their femininity as activism through self-branding. In this way, breaking down norms surrounding gender and sexuality becomes part of a feminine identity and a way for women to use digital spaces to reclaim femininity as a resource. In this sense, the authors conclude that Instagram as a digital space can be useful as a platform to activate feminism surrounding sexuality. This being said, they too note the inherent tensions on Instagram between positions of resistance and compliance. They argue that it is this tension

that actually characterises feminist visibilities and activisms on social media. Whilst challenging norms surrounding gender and sexuality allows feminist Instagram users to contribute to feminist activisms, this can only be done moderately in order to maintain the social capital that comes from being a well-known Instagram feminist. As such, Savolainen, Uitermark, and Boy (2022) suggest that it is important to engage in a critical account of the emotional and aesthetic labour inherent to working on social media, especially when feminist discourse becomes part of a toolkit of self-branding.

Whilst Savolainen, Uitermark, and Boy's (2022) research is with feminist women Instagram users and so is useful in helping to understand how women experience digital platforms, this is not necessarily the same experience that digital feminist artists have, especially regarding the tensions surrounding women's sexuality. Vitis and Gilmour (2017) do look at one feminist art project in their exploration of feminist resistance in relation to online sexual harassment. In their research, they focus on Anna Gensler's Instagram art project entitled *Instagranniepants* in order to explore how women artists construct a creative resistance imbued with critical comedy in order to expose online sexual harassment. This type of Instagram art, they suggest, reappropriates and reinterprets language of cybercultures to challenge the ways in which women are represented and understood within public spaces, using these techniques to expose and punish sexual harassment.

Anna Gensler's project, *Instagranniepants*, is an Instagram account which is filled with satire drawings of nude men who have harassed the artist on dating apps such as Tinder. These drawings are accompanied by a quote, something that the men have said in a message to the artist in their communications with her on the dating app. The type of resistance here is different to how Crepax (2020) describes a growing Instagram aesthetic. Here, Vitis and Gilmour (2017) argue that Gensler uses comedy in her art, which invites audiences to ridicule, critically witness, and laugh at these drawings of these men. They further suggest that in creating this work, Gensler is illustrating how women can use the tools of the internet to their advantage, to bring about a sense of community informal justice for women that pose a direct challenge to the ways in which women are thought of as passive recipients of online sexual harassment. In doing the work to 'objectify back' (341), Gensler's art aims to name and draw attention to perpetrators who usually are shielded by the namelessness of online spaces. This challenges the male gaze as it relates to both art and online spaces.

Whilst this research is important in contributing to the understanding of how different types of feminist activism are happening in digital spaces, and how art plays a central role in resisting narratives surrounding representations of women and also narratives of public spaces, there remains scope for research to further explore the experiences of the artists themselves as they navigate through working and existing on these digital platforms.

Olszanowski's (2014) research does begin to explore the experiences of feminist artists who also work with Instagram. In her research working with digital artists, she explores the practices that women artists use to navigate the ways that their work, and consequently their bodies, are regulated on Instagram. Her research is primarily concerned with women artists who use self-imaging in their work, meaning that they use images of their own bodies in the work that they produce, making them both the subject and object simultaneously. She outlines that the three women have been affected by Instagram's policies surrounding censorship, and argues that these women are in constant negotiation of censorship leading to some specific techniques which challenge censoring of the senses. A censoring of the senses, which Olszanowski (2014) names sensorship describes what is happening on a wider scale when Instagram censors certain images. Sensorship refers to a removal of the experience of senses when engaging with an image, as opposed to censorship which defines the removal of objectional images or content. To negate this sensorship, Olszanowski (2014) identifies three tactics that the women used, these include obscuring the body in images, privatising accounts, and using timed removal of images from accounts. Each of these techniques requires artists to be aware and consciously work this negotiation of sensorship into their practices, and is a specific aspect of working with Instagram. Ultimately, Olszanowski (2014) argues that because of this negotiation, women artists who use Instagram present fragmented and fractured versions of selves and of bodies, which are in part fragmented by sensorship. Regardless of this constant negotiation and invention of new tactics, she found that the women in her research wanted to stay on Instagram as opposed to moving to different platforms with less restrictions. Because of this ongoing relationship between artists and Instagram, Olszanowski (2014) highlights a new type of aesthetics that is emerging, sentio aesthetics, which refers to how the tactics of navigating sensorship produces a new type of feminist aesthetic which is imbued with self-censorship and the fragmentation of women's bodies.

Olszanowski's (2014) work is important because it provides an alternative understanding of how digital platforms such as Instagram are inspiring, by choice or by necessity, a new feminist aesthetic. However, where Crepax (2020) identifies this aesthetic as a return to hyper

femininity, Olszanowski (2014) sees fragmentation and tension between artists and platforms forming the basis of a new aesthetic. Moreover, Vitis and Gilmour (2017) offer the different notion of humour as an emerging feminist sensibility and aesthetic which is happening through Instagram. Whilst these approaches differ and offer multiple possibilities for new feminist visibilities, they all point towards digital platforms being a space which is shaping contemporary feminist visual cultures and activisms. Whilst the research here documents the relationship between technology, art, and feminism, they all point towards the aesthetic value that this has. My research will work alongside this research to explore how digital feminist artists themselves are experiencing the production of this work. Therefore, my work is necessary because it provides insight into the lived and embodied ways in which technology matters for digital feminist artists, which moves beyond thinking about the aesthetic consequences to this intersection.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has brought together aspects of the fields of the sociology of art, feminist art history, and feminist theorising of technologies to demonstrate a need for research focusing on the production of digital feminist art. Such research can make contributions to each of these fields in turn, whilst also exploring emerging connections between them. Doing this will contribute to constructing a specific feminist sociology of art which understands how feminist artists experience production in contemporary digital settings, and how this contributes to feminist politics of embodiment.

The sociology of art, as detailed in section 2.2 sets the foundation for this project by exploring how a sociological perspective offers scope for art to be understood as a process which is socially, culturally, and politically situated. It is useful to understand the art world as a social convention, the joint activity of multiple social actors because this provides a framework for conceptualising art as something happening beyond the artist as individual. The sociology of art, particularly Janet Wolff's (1993) ideas, place the process of creating art and art objects themselves into a cultural realm. Therefore, the sociology of art is further helpful in articulating a clear ground from which to develop an understanding of the production of art as a cultural phenomenon which is embedded within social relations whilst simultaneously reproducing those very relations. My research here will expand on concepts from the sociology of art, aiming to develop a specific feminist sociology within the field. A feminist sociology of art will begin from the notion that art is a social process and product which is embedded within specific social and cultural contexts, whilst pushing this further by paying attention to how

gender matters within this process, particularly within contemporary digital cultures. In highlighting the need for a gendered focus within the sociology of art, I am responding to Howson's (2005) critique of the field. As she argues that there is no specific *feminist* sociology of art from which to fully articulate a field, she acknowledges the need for this area to be developed further. In agreeing with Howson (2005), my research can contribute to the development of a feminist sociology of art by exploring the ways in which digital spaces and cultures are experienced by feminist artists. This offers both a contribution to the sociology of art as a field, by engaging with the gendered politics of art production, strengthening the relationship between feminism and sociology within the field, and also develops a specific feminist sociology by contributing an understanding of how the digital intersects with gender.

In looking to feminist art history and aesthetics to further ground this work in a feminist politics, I have demonstrated how feminisms have understood art both in terms of the process of creating art and art objects themselves. This section highlights the ways in which discourses of art history have been sexist, playing a central role in the reproduction of representations of binary notions of womanhood and femininity. I have also explored in this chapter how the feminist art movement challenges these ideas through aesthetic means, inserting the body and feminine sensibility into artmaking which poses a direct resistance towards dominant ways of knowing about the body particularly within art. Specific feminist aesthetic strategies were discussed in this chapter as playing a central role in asserting feminist art practices, and whilst the work of feminist art history and criticism is influential to this project, the focus of this research is located within the experiences of production. This project will borrow from feminist art history as a discipline to consider how the practices and experiences of digital feminist artists contribute to feminist notions of resistance from outside of, but alongside, aesthetics. Whilst aesthetics will be important, the main focus here is on production and the experiences of production, of being, and how aesthetics is consciously thought about in the production process for digital feminist artists.

In section 2.4 of this chapter, I have demonstrated how digital space offers new epistemic ground for exploring how feminist art is produced. Where the politics of cyberfeminism set an alternative agenda for a digital aesthetics foreground in theoretical dialogue surrounding women's relationship to technology, there is a recent, noticeable shift in what digital spaces look like when produced within a feminist framework. This shift opens up space for this research, which will address how feminist art is produced within this context. Discussions of cyberfeminism in this section explore how feminism has conceptualised the internet and digital

spaces as spaces of feminist promise. The production of art within cyberfeminist narratives are emblematic of dreams of disembodiment, and they actively challenge binaries surrounding embodiment. Where cyberfeminist art has been theorised and explored in this way, my research can contribute to this field by working with feminist artists who produce digital art but who do not necessarily identify with cyberfeminist politics or aesthetics. The women involved in this research are embedded within digital cultures more broadly, and their work is often situated in more mainstream digital locations with a developing particular aesthetic as described by Crepax (2020). So, this research will work from within the tenets of cyberfeminist theory to understand contemporary uses and experiences of digital spaces for feminist artists, developing the extent to which cyberfeminism can be drawn upon to understand more contemporary engagements between women, art, and the internet particularly in relation to embodiment.

Throughout this chapter as a whole, discussions are underscored by a consideration of epistemology. The ways in which knowledges are produced are central to feminist conceptualisations of art making, embodiment, and technology, and feminist theory more broadly. The following chapter continues to develop an understanding of feminist ways of knowing in order to establish the direction that this research takes in relation to an epistemic position. In highlighting the centrality of epistemology both within this literature and throughout this research, I aim to highlight the complexity of feminist thinking in order to fully articulate the position which digital feminist artists occupy and construct as well as the position from which I conduct this research.

Chapter 3: Feminist ways of knowing

3.1 Introduction

Before outlining specific methods which shape this project in the following chapter, it is important to explore the epistemological and methodological debates which surround feminist research in order to develop and set forth the perspectives which run through the project as a whole. This chapter details different feminist epistemological perspectives. It is important to consider differing perspectives of feminist ways of knowing because it solidifies a position within research and the broader academy, and fundamentally informs and underpins methods and ways of doing research. This consideration is important to my research as it aims to work with and contribute to ways of doing research in feminist ways, furthering the resistance central to my approach.

Firstly, feminist empiricism is explored in relation to the production of masculinised knowledge and enlightenment thinking, challenging the way knowledge is produced though questioning how methods are used (Longino, 1990; Nelson, 1990; Anderson, 1995). Secondly, there is a shift to contemplating the appropriateness of feminist standpoint theory especially in relation to the situatedness of knowledge (Hartstock, 1983; Harding, 1987, Wylie, 2003). This offers a view from the position of women and begins with their experiences as women. Next, the concept of difference is introduced by looking at postmodern feminist epistemology which begins from entirely different positions and proceeds in different directions, offering accounts of freedom from scientific methods by questioning the connections between reality, knowledge, and power (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). This is helpful in highlighting how the perspective of feminist standpoints is preferred within this project and how postmodern thought is a powerful and important influence. Finally, an exploration of the epistemological basis of feminist art aesthetics and art practice helps to establish a direction for the narrative of the project which justifies a postmodern feminist perspective.

Acknowledging the complexities embedded within feminist epistemological positions highlights the need to recognise issues of both materiality and difference. Evidently, the notion of feminism is not a uniform term (Osborne, 2001). There are contradictions and tensions inherent to its politics, and in understanding and appreciating the messiness of feminist research (Valentine, 2001; Billo & Hiemstra, 2013), we can begin thinking about epistemology from a position that challenges and deconstructs how knowledge is historically and socially produced, constructed, and shared. Different ways of knowing have characterised specific times and

places throughout history, and although different epistemological positions have flourished through different waves of feminism, I do not want to suggest a linear or progressive model of feminism as a political and theoretical movement, or as a finished product regarding epistemology. Rather, differing viewpoints exist simultaneously and are in conversation with each other, all positions are part of a continuing practical struggle over how we can know and how we can research (Evans & Chamberlain, 2014). Furthermore, Intemann (2010) suggests that much recent writing on feminist philosophies and epistemologies has been concerned with clarifying and strengthening different epistemological positions, and through exploring the nuances of feminist philosophies it is now unclear what differences actually exist in contemporary versions, especially regarding feminist empiricism and standpoint theory. Consequently, Intemann (2010, 779) concludes that each viewpoint has much to gain from each other, and that the strongest, most nuanced interpretations of each philosophical position 'are now in substantive agreement'. What follows is a separation of perspectives in order to discuss different points of view in detail. Whilst I accept this as a problematic way to present feminist ways of knowing, it seems appropriate to acknowledge each perspective in order to highlight struggles, tensions, and nuances in order to notice how differing approaches depend on each other, and construct a framework for my research which draws on such debates.

Underpinning all positions is the notion that feminist epistemologies are forms of intellectual resistance (DeLauretis & White, 2007). Historically, knowledge of the academy has been pervasive and dominant within western culture since the seventeenth century, as new epistemological spaces were opened through the development of the new human sciences disciplines which relied upon 'man' as their object of knowledge (Foucault, 1973). Following this, governed by social structures imbued within patriarchal systems, 'men have used their positions of power to define issues, structure language and develop theory' (Letherby, 2003, 20). As Oakley (1974) described, theories of social sciences are built upon a man's relationship to his social world, a social world which is based on the division between public and private space. She goes on to argue that the founding fathers of sociology wrote theoretically in times where the separation of public and private space appeared natural and unchanging, and gendered norms followed suit. With men's positions within social structures being firmly rooted in the public sphere, attempting to understand and theorise social life as a full and complete total society, is seemingly misguided and partial. This contributed to a somewhat continuing culture of the masculinised production of knowledge, whereby knowledge can be authorised, and only certain members of society can claim access to it, as in order to establish

rationality there has to be some concept of irrationality which ultimately rests on a gendered binary (Rose, 1993). With women's historical exclusion from social institutions within the public domain – law, politics, and education – masculinised knowledge has been reproduced and legitimised, and is synonymous with authorised knowledge. In this sense, things that can be 'known' are only drawn from authorised knowledges rather than experiential knowledges, which are based on people's everyday experience of their lives. Experiences are often ascribed to marginalised people, including women, and devalued due to their apparent association with the body and subsequent dissociation with the mind (Grosz, 1992).

The value of scientific thought was born from enlightenment principles, which view objectivity, rationality, and reason as the fundamental basis of science as a way of knowing, and Science as a discipline (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). If men and masculine knowledge is bound in notions of reason, then women and experiential knowledge becomes synonymous with non-reason because of the association of masculinity with the mind (Lloyd, 1984). Dichotomous relationships both consolidate and reproduce a history of gendered relations of power, and reason/non-reason sits alongside culture/nature, reason/emotion, objective/subjective, mind/body, public/private, and ultimately man/woman, whereby the latter is always dominated by the former, and the latter is consistently and systematically attributed to the feminine (Wajcman, 1991). In relation to epistemology then, sexist thinking has been marked as scientific thinking as reason becomes the distinction between men and women. The concept of reason allowed the legitimisation of knowledge to be foreground in ways of knowing about women and about the world from the position of men, which reinforces the notion that women do not have access to knowledge in an epistemic sense (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). We only know women in masculine terms. The masculinisation of scientific reasoning institutionalises the legitimation of authority and authoritative knowledge and as a result, excludes certain subjects from the hierarchical institutions that grant such knowledges. (Bleier, 1986; Keller & Longino, 1996). Because women have been excluded from the production of knowledge, their experiences, their bodies, and their ways of knowing about the world are not represented and they cannot be known in the same way that women cannot be 'knowers' (Leatherby, 2003). This coupled with all of the binary dualisms in which women are bound into means that women's experiences are not considered part of the dominant scientific and objective construction of knowledge, and therefore cannot have any relation to truth. Also, women cannot pose a direct challenge to malestream ways of knowing because of the lack of power awarded to their feminine ways of knowing. Doing feminist research sheds light on the

power imbued within these discourses, recognising that knowing is a political activity (Code, 1989, 2014). Masculine and ultimately dominant epistemology is ideological in that it maintains the subordination of women through their association with nature, the body, and subjectivity. Male defined epistemologies deny the experiences of women. As a form of resistance, feminism and feminist research is directly concerned with the inclusion of women's personal and subjective experiences in differing institutions. To be a direct criticism of this type of knowledge produced, feminist epistemology aims to write women's experiences and narratives into the academy and challenge notions of knowing through a masculinist perspective resting on enlightenment thinking, centring the lives of women in producing knowledges (Stanley & Wise, 1983; Delamont, 2003).

3.2 Feminist empiricism

Characterised by offering the option of a successor science project (Harding, 1986), feminist empiricism at first glance could be argued to challenge the way we think of knowledge through critiquing the methods used within scientific paradigms. Feminist empiricists deny that science has one set of unified aims, instead suggesting that methods vary depending on the context on the research (Intemann, 2010), so aim to develop a science with emancipatory goals to serve social purposes (Okrulik, 2003). Smart (1990) suggests that methods used under the name of science simply represents a world from the perspective of men, meaning that the notion of objectivity can actually just be labelled as sexism. This is because the questions that are asked and the things that are observed only reinforce the exclusion of women from narratives of social life. Feminist empiricists argue for the recognition that science and scientific knowledge is socially located and always contextual (Longino, 1990). In this sense, feminist empiricists could do research from a different perspective with an awareness of gender biases within social research methods and processes so that evidence can be constructed holistically to include commonly held beliefs about sex and gender (Nelson, 1990). Because of the attention and acknowledgment drawn to these gendered and sexist elements of research, feminist empiricists offer new ways of doing research as a successor science and see this way of knowing as a good science (Campbell, 1998). Furthering this, Longino (1990) urges that when doing research, we should treat science as a practice rather than a product, ensuring that we do science as a feminist, meaning that we can practice science guided by the principles of living a feminist life. However, feminist empiricists do not promote any specific method or methodology, making it difficult to actually practice science according to established feminist tenets (Hundleby, 2012).

Some supporters of feminist empiricism maintain the viewpoint that a universal truth exists and is waiting to be discovered (see for example Abbott & Wallace, 1997; Millen, 1997) and the operationalisation of rationality and evidence provide standards for scientific testing (Hundelby, 2012). Alternatively, other feminist empiricists avoid the notion of truth, preferring empirical adequacy and the concept of values in order to reject the idea that knowledge exists outside of the knower and instead use objective scientific methods to test truths (Kuhn, 1977). Furthermore, contemporary ideas about feminist empiricism suggest that the position of objectivity lies within scientific communities rather than individuals. This is because individual scientific researchers are rarely likely to be able to acknowledge their own biases when framing research questions or posing hypotheses, so the onus of objectivity is placed within communities which should be made up of individuals with diverse values (Anderson, 2006; Solomon, 2006). When scientific communities are diverse, then the community will be better equipped to recognise the ways that values shape the reasoning of individual scientists and this will help eliminate bias (Longino, 1990). Avoiding the sexist bias inherent in masculinised knowledge is the aim of a feminism successor science from this perspective, and the interest lies in producing a good science that investigates social life through the social values that individuals embody. With this, there exists the need to acknowledge why research is carried out, by who, and who it is about; and in this sense feminist empiricism hints towards a political engagement with social research (Intemann, 2010) which in itself is a rejection of the notion of the knower as separate from the known.

Although not directly working from an empiricist position, this project values the ways in which feminist empiricists used method as a means to recognise the politics and values of researchers. The notion that political matters affect how theories are generated has influenced this project by highlighting the importance of continuously exploring taken for granted values and has instilled the imperative for constant reflexivity. However, this project does not intend to produce a reflexive account in order to eliminate bias, rather reflexivity will be an ongoing process which is valuable to the data and subsequent analysis as it helps to ruminate about the workings and nuances of power within feminist collaborative research. Therefore, although promoting engagement with reflexive practice, this project cannot claim to be inspired by the philosophies of feminist empiricism. Also, there is little consensus as to which values are important or how we can measure them against each other within empiricist thinking (Hundelby, 2012). This perspective is not helpful in thinking through women's digital art practice in a methodological way and is also unhelpful in that the empiricist goals of truth

finding and truth telling remain central, and this project aims to construct knowledges with participants and is not interested in producing epistemologically objective work. Thus, because of the reliance on science, feminist empiricism has been labelled 'the least threatening of feminist epistemologies' (Leatherby, 2003, 43).

3.3 Feminist standpoint theory

Perhaps posing a greater threat to traditional scientific ways of knowing is feminist standpoint. Feminist standpoint is a powerful area within debates around fusing feminist knowledge and women's experiences with gendered social relationships. The production of knowledge comes from the standpoints of women wherever they live within unequal gendered social relations, exploring how women experience the world differently to men because of the unique position they hold in relation to a patriarchal social order (Ramazanolgu & Holland, 2002). In this sense, the notion of a women's standpoint develops a political consciousness (see for example Collins, 1991; Hartstock, 1983). Born from the perspective that the personal is political, standpoint theory asserts that experience should be the absolute starting point for any kind of knowledge production, and that social life needs to be understood from the perspective of women in their everyday, embodied lives (Smith, 1997). Enforcing the notion that politics and epistemology are indivisible, feminist standpoint centres women speaking about their experiences *as women* which directly results in different knowledges being produced about women and their gendered realities as they exist socially and politically. As such, Hekman (1997) points to how feminist standpoint theory has deconstructed the very tradition that it emerged from, this being enlightenment thinking. 'Women speaking their truth' (Hekman, 1997, 399) directly challenges and threatens enlightenment thinking through transforming the truths and the knowledges which had been defined through scientific thought, grounding knowledge in the knower and their experiences in relation to power. Although an influential aspect of feminist politics, feminist standpoint is not without debate or criticism amongst standpoint theorists (see for example Collins, 1997; Hartstock, 1997; Harding, 1997; Smith, 1997). The critical conversations around feminist standpoint are important to explore as they grapple with notions of the knower and knowing, and how gendered knowledge is produced, factors which are fundamental to this project.

Reframing Marxist thinking, feminist standpoint theory observes that situatedness occupied by marginalised groups, in this case women, is central to knowledge which can be produced and experienced. Nancy Hartstock (1983) directly draws upon Marxist theories to discern that women occupy a better position than men to view the social world in its gendered and unequal

ways. She argues the case that women have an epistemic advantage, a central theme of feminist standpoint epistemology (Wylie, 2003), through their experiences of gender subordination. This is cast from the Marxist idea that workers have access to knowledge of the exploitative nature of capitalist systems in which they are positioned as unequal and subordinate. Knowledge from this position differs from the dominant knowledges on capitalist systems which are produced by people in positions of power and view capitalism as natural (Marx, 1976). In this sense, women experience the world differently to men because they are located within a different social relationship to exercises of power and a standpoint can be possible if women experience gendered material differences (Hartstock, 1983).

The idea of material relations is central to Hartstock's (1983) conceptualisation of women's standpoint, again adopting Marxist theory, she argues that dominant ways of knowing about gender are patriarchal. This patriarchal knowledge serves to structure the material relations of gender in which all men and women are subject to. Therefore, the power attributed to this knowledge cannot be considered false as this is too simple a claim within such complex webs of power and knowledge. A feminist standpoint represents an achievement which rests upon the struggle to establish a feminist consciousness. This must be achieved by feminist theories understanding the essential gender relations which exist beneath patriarchal visions of gender in order to expose the real relations of gender subordination (Hartstock, 1983). Whilst this argument has been criticised for being essentialist, Hartstock (1983) maintains the position that real material relations of gender are essential in the sense that they are necessary for patriarchy to operate. The essential notions of gender relations according to this position are not bound to the body, or in being a woman, rather essentialism refers to material conditions of gender which can be discovered through raising a political feminist consciousness. Thus, Hartstock favours a realist epistemology in arguing that essential relations of power affect lives regardless of individuals being aware of those relations of power or not. From this, a standpoint can be understood as knowledge and a position which has been struggled for by women politically committed to challenging unequal gender relationships (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

It is thought from this perspective that beginning to research from the standpoint of women will allow access to knowledge from the more privileged position of the oppressed (Hartstock, 1997; Wylie, 2003). A marginalised standpoint is considered a privilege due to viewing society from that oppressed position, but also due to being able to see ways in which oppression happens, and who occupies positions of oppressor. This is not to say that the oppressed see more, or see in better ways, rather that situated knowledge emerges from a personal and

political struggle against oppressive relations of power (Millen, 1997). This distinct way of knowing assumes that by the virtue of being oppressed, all women share a universal experience (Hekman, 1997; Haack, 1998). Beginning to 'know' from the standpoint of women is argued to be able to generate less partial and fragmented accounts of a whole social order as it can be known from differing perspectives and is born from engaging in struggle to understand the experiences of how women's lives have been known from a perspective that is not theirs (Harding, 1987, 1993). As an act of conscious resistance, feminist standpoint epistemology champions an approach which would lead to holistic and connected knowledge about the social world from the standpoint of women, and as direct opposition to the analytically produced forms of masculine knowledge about women. Thus, like feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory is a successor science with emancipatory goals.

An alternative version of feminist standpoint rejects Hartstock's (1983) concept of realism, that realities exist distinctly from the knower and a standpoint is a way of discovering them and coming into political consciousness, meaning that it would be impossible to conceive of women's knowledge as privileged (Smith, 1997). Favouring the notion of actuality, Dorothy Smith (1997) argues that women's standpoint takes into consideration realities which are constituted through social practices located in their lives. In other words, women's standpoint is located within a complex web of social processes and knowledge constructions. This differs from Hartstock (1983) in that Smith (1997) opposes the idea that reality exists outside of consciousness and asserts that knowledge is continuously being brought into being through the experiences that women have within the social organisation of their lives as gendered beings. Accordingly, knowledge is a constant construction rather than something that pre-exists and governs experiences. In this, although both Hartstock (1983) and Smith (1997) understand experience as central to the production of knowledges around male power, Smith sees the issues of experience and reality as not opposing territories, and instead urges that when women speak about their experiences of being subordinated, then they produce knowledges that do not exist within dominant discourse. As a result, experiential knowledge cannot be considered to have a direct tie to reality or truth because this feminist knowledge is actively situated and embodied through living and knowing. With this, the concept of actuality encompasses the folding of concepts, theory, and discourse to exist within embodied experiences and it is these practices which constitute a women's standpoint. This does not so much mean that nothing is real and that reality as a concept is obsolete within feminist thinking, but this position is about understanding that material differences structure social inequalities, but these realities are

socially produced, organised, and maintained and it is the experiences of these constructions which constitute a social reality from which women can claim a standpoint on knowledge (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

This particular strand of standpoint theory is useful to my research as it emphasises the importance of women's everyday experiences. As this project aims to construct knowledges with women about their experiences of producing digital feminist art, it is helpful to explore how we can think about the epistemic basis of knowledge production as it relates to feminist theory. Smith's (1997) notion of actuality is useful to this project in grounding an epistemic basis for knowledge production which can consciously centre the lived, embodied experiences of women to construct narratives that do not depend on truth finding, but prefer to explore and critique the notion of truth as a discursive form of power. This being said, this position is similar to Hartstock (1983) in that it relies on women sharing some kind of common experience of gendered subordination. Not only does this emphasise the outdatedness of these theoretical positionings but also it highlights how knowledge from any version of a standpoint is fragile and needs further exploration incorporating the concept of difference. Purposefully incorporating ideas of difference would help to reconcile the debates of second wave feminism with more contemporary feminisms which advocate difference, as traditions of feminisms appear to be at odds over standpoint theory (Hekman, 1997).

Focusing on commonalities between women in order to envision a standpoint has been challenged particularly from postmodern theorists and black feminist thought (see for example Collins, 1991; O'Brien Hallstein, 2000). The crux of the criticism is that the universalising of women's experiences trivialises and obscures the experiences of marginalised women whose differences have roots in their classed, raced, and sexualised identities (Dougherty & Krone, 2000). Therefore, thinking about women's standpoint in terms of their commonalities actually serves to reinforce a universalisation of women's experience, producing knowledge about women which does not represent the uniqueness of women and their differences from each other. The white, middle class woman takes the position of woman in this context meaning that the knowledges specific to different identities is not accounted for by the notion of a standpoint. All women do not experience their relationship to power in the same way, and whilst Hartstock (1983) does acknowledge that her vision of a standpoint may exclude lesbians and women of colour, she does not offer a way to be more inclusive of the knowledges which exist within these differences. Collins (1990) emphasises the importance of recognising the differences between women by foregrounding the notion that intersecting identities produce different

knowledges. To use her example, black women are marginalised from authoritative knowledge production as their knowledges about their identities do not simply arise from individual experiences. Their bodies and their gendered experiences are historically and socially specific meaning a standpoint cannot claim to be rooted in experience of gendered materiality.

Furthering this, it is simplistic and irresponsible to consider that all women have a shared, unique experience of being an oppressed class, in the same way that assuming all men have equal access to dominant forms of being is unproductive within social science research. Different women benefit from different systems of levels of access to power, and gender is only one socially constructed and maintained element of experience. Women are also embedded within historical narratives that shape differing experiences of womanhood. For example, hooks (1984) notes that black women have been systematically exploited throughout history and white women benefit from this exploitation. Therefore, not only might black women be more likely to understand their gendered experiences as heavily racialised and more in line with the experience of black men who have less access to hegemonic modes of dominance; but this also highlights how there cannot be only one experience from the standpoint of women, as multiple factors shape being a woman. Leatherby (2003) argues that each woman has a unique form of womanhood and experiences the world through these multiple and fractured identities, any of these fragments of identity could arguably form a standpoint from which to understand and produce knowledge.

Furthermore, claiming to have an epistemically privileged vision of the workings of gender based on a shared standpoint is problematic in that it simply replaces one dominant set of claims with another (Hirschmann, 1997). A standpoint reverses the identities associated with the dominant/oppressed dichotomy, and places women's knowledge as more real because women have a greater access to the objective truths through their understanding of oppression. The suggestion that a feminist epistemological position and feminist knowledge can access the truth about gender is problematic in that it assumes that people without access to feminist theory are living under a false consciousness in understanding their masculinity or femininity to be natural (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Privileging one type of knowledge over another only serves to reinforce the idea that some knowledges are superior which is ultimately a tool of patriarchal control of relations of gender subordination. Cain (1986; 1990) argues that feminist theory does not need to lay claim to any kind of epistemological privilege because it needs to incorporate a diversity of women's experiences. In this sense, knowledge produced from a feminist

standpoint should be more concerned with the political and potentially transformative relationship to power than constructing a dominant narrative.

Feminist standpoint theory argues that scientific thinking, especially around objectivity, has been inaccurate with its claims made about women and therefore rejects the notion of objectivity provided by men within a masculinised system of knowing. However, standpoint theories remain invested in the production of scientific knowledge and maintain an importance in the concept of objectivity as a way of knowing truths (Harding, 1991). In this vein, some standpoint theorists support the notion that knowledge is a political act which cannot be separated from a person's social location. Knowledge then arises from personal engagement with sites of political struggles over identity. Within traditional research practice, the claims to knowledge that are made cannot be labelled as objective because the values and identities of the researcher are hidden, meaning that there is no indication of where that knowledge came from. Harding (1993) argues that this way of doing research leads to weak objectivity, as a failure to interrogate social situations and the effects of social situations on our beliefs and values contributes to 'a scientific and epistemologically disadvantaged' (54) basis for producing knowledge. For Harding (1991, 1993), a strong objectivity recognises that all knowledge is socially situated and in order to be objective, researchers must critically evaluate social situations in order claim strong objectivity.

Following this, engaging in a reflexive research process is considered to be a scientific advantage in that it does interrogate who the knower is in relation to the knowledge produced and also challenges knowledge that has previously been produced which tells truths about women and their lives. Reflexivity leads to strong objectivity from the perspective of feminist standpoint theory. This is a successor science in that this type of research is scientifically preferable because it begins from and is rigorously tested against a more full and complete type of experience than that of masculinised, partial knowledge (Stanley and Wise, 1993). In this sense, objectivity can be useful to feminism as it aids in presenting a less partial and distorted conception of women and their lives if objective knowledge arises from women's standpoints. Harding (1991, 1993) considers this to be an important aspect of producing feminist knowledge because it enables the telling of stories that are more accurate than if they were told from the perspective of dominant groups. Whilst this is a compelling argument which sits neatly with feminist desires to know how the world is for women (Harding, 1991), it seemingly loses the epistemological notion that feminist knowledge is a political *struggle*. Feminist knowledges are messy and complex, and it is more important for my research to value the diverse

experiences that women have as they produce art rather than tell objective truths about women as a complete social group. Exploring the methodological implications of standpoint theory has accentuated the necessity for this research to work from a postmodern feminist epistemic position in which fragmentation and difference are central to the knowledges produced.

Feminist standpoint has contributed significantly to debates on the production of feminist knowledge and feminist epistemologies. The idea that knowledge is always situated and social, and embodied (Smith, 1997) has been influential for my research as it allows the production of knowledges to be grounded in a feminist epistemological and ontological position and to be understood outside of dominant forms of discourse. As well as this, standpoint theories highlight the political basis of feminist knowledges and this is also a tenet which this project aims to take forward into its methodology in order to explore how gender and the body are constructed and experienced in relation to power.

This discussion has highlighted some contradictions and tensions among standpoint theorists particularly pertaining to the notion of reality and truth. In order to explore this more fully, and to incorporate the notion of difference into the feminist epistemological underpinnings of knowledge production that this project aims to work from, it would be more useful to focus on postmodern understandings of epistemology and its relationship to feminisms.

3.4 Feminist postmodernism

Difference and fragmentation are central to a postmodern feminist epistemology. In this, feminist postmodernism is not a critique of the aforementioned epistemic positions, and it does not attempt to rectify the problems with other positions, rather it begins from an entirely different place. In their influential essay, *Social criticism without Philosophy*, Fraser and Nicholson (1988) envision how postmodernism and feminism can combine the incredulity of metanarratives with critiques of social power in order to 'analyse sexism in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity' (34). For a postmodern feminism, they anticipated an understanding that social categories are temporal and historically specific. This means that social categories would be framed by historical narratives which are culturally specific to different groups within different time periods and different locations. Moreover, non-universalism would be, and is, central to a postmodern feminism, meaning that attention is focused around contrasts and differences as opposed to governing laws. The notion of plurality is central here and this refers not only to the ways in which we consider identity, but also the ways that we consider postmodernism itself as a theoretical position. Thus, it is difficult and

somewhat unhelpful to pin down a concrete definition of postmodern theory as a unified position (Best & Kellner, 1991). This project does not attempt to characterise historical narratives of postmodern thought, rather postmodernism is distinguished by the challenges and freedoms it offers feminisms, and is subsequently woven into the fragments of my research as it relates to notions of truth, experience, reality, knowledge and power.

The significance of the relationship between postmodernism and feminism, and significant to my research, is the criticism of feminist knowledge being ground in the experience of women and the authority that feminism has on knowledge about women. Where standpoint theory decentres patriarchal knowledges, elements of postmodernism offer a more radical troubling of knowledge about women through uncoupling knowledge and power to show how knowledge has been produced and the effects this has on how we think about gender. The challenges that postmodernism poses towards feminism offers useful ways to think about the production of knowledge and provides ways of thinking about methodology from this point. This project takes the position that postmodern thought offers feminism new ways of thinking about gender through allowing a sense of freedom from modernist, scientific thought. This being said, similarly to Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), I remain mindful of the strains and tensions between postmodernism and feminism and argue that feminism should preserve some of its stances in the way that it aims to conduct social research and further political activisms both in and outside of the academy. It is equally productive and important to intertwine postmodernism into this project because it allows feminist research to further explore how power operates within digital art spaces on a wider scale whilst also still complementing the feminist goals of the project to hear women's stories and make sense of experience in fragmented realms.

Beginning with the concepts of truth and reality, Foucault (1980, 1984) rejects the notion that realities exist and can be discovered, preferring to ask the questions of why there are different claims to knowledge rather than asking which knowledge is true. His argument is that scientific discourse is historically specific which operates sets of rules which govern what is or is not real. In this, scientific knowledge is discursive in that it specifies what counts as knowledge using concepts of reality and truth which have been taken for granted concepts since the enlightenment period. Much feminist thinking builds from these foundations and looks at truth uncritically because early feminist thinking was often constrained in how they could think about gender in relation to power within discourses that already existed as truths (Hekman, 1992). Foucault's (1984) approach suggests that discourses operate in different ways and for different reasons throughout specific time periods. In this, feminist knowledge can be counted

as discourse, a way of establishing what counts as knowledge. As scientific discourse has dominated knowledge, this discourse sets out the rules of what or what cannot be known which is embedded within relations of power. In using sexuality in his work, Foucault explores how notions of reality cannot ever be discoverable because they only exist within discourses that govern experiences of sexuality. Experiences and realities of sexualities are only real in the sense that they are constructed by and established within discourse which outline what sexuality is and what sexuality can be. This knowledge is constituted through authorities such as education and medicine and this ultimately governs behaviours for particular effects and for particular reasons. The objects of discourse around sexuality, for example the 'good wife', are constructed in language, produced through discourse, and made legitimate through arenas of authority. Therefore, there is no veiled reality waiting to be discovered by scientific, objective rigour. Rather, realities and experiences are produced and experienced through discourses to powerful effects.

Working from this stance offers freedoms in light of what feminist postmodern research can achieve. If reality is not something to be discovered, then research can focus in on exploring how discourses come to operate and the effects this has on social life. For feminists, this has great opportunity for a deeper understanding of the ways that the position of women has been understood throughout history and offers scope to detangle the webs of discourse interlaced with relations of power to challenge how women are constituted in everyday life, thus their realities. The notion that science and the scientific method does not offer any understanding of 'truth' tames the power that it holds over knowledge production. Deflating the boundaries between truth and reality makes space for subjugated voices and this calls for a focus on autobiographies and experiences, to tell fragmented and different stories and to further question how some knowledges appear as fact. Some feminist researchers have revelled in applying postmodern thought to feminism in order to give greater attention to how power and knowledge production are embroiled and how exactly power operates, from a feminist perspective (see for example McRobbie, 1997 and Skeggs, 1995). There is an argument here that feminism is in itself a postmodern theory (Flax, 1987, Nash, 1994), and that it is unhelpful to note feminism and postmodernism as two distinct entities which influence one another. However, it seems unproductive to view postmodern and feminist thought as a unified entity when the crux of each are distinct especially in terms of their political potentials. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, 86) argue, postmodern thinking can be 'politically conservative while being intellectually radical, and some feminist engagement with liberal and Marxist thought is still

potentially productive'. As previously stated, it is important that the politics of feminism remain at the heart of this project whilst postmodernism simultaneously offers freedoms in thinking about truths, power, and realities.

One way that postmodernism offers new scope and freedom for feminism is using deconstruction as a concept. Drawn from Derrida (1970), deconstruction refers to being able to critically analyse the binaries in which scientific knowledge has been produced. Deconstruction allows the questioning of assumptions and brings to light the binaries which support assumptions and knowledges that we hold regarding social life. Critically analysing socially constructed binaries forces research to question the ways in which truths have been socially constituted for particular reasons. In thinking about the body and embodiment as it relates to this project, deconstructionism is helpful in exposing how binaries are in themselves hierarchal, with two opposing positions where one is loaded with more power than the other. Cartesian dualism, as previously discussed, sets out meanings of the body through the construction of binary terms which places masculinity as exclusive to femininity and prioritised over femininity through its presence and its essence within that binary structure. Femininity becomes the other and is characterised through its absence and derivation of masculinity. As such, masculinity has the authority to bespeak femininity. Using deconstruction to expose and critically analyse binaries which underpin many feminist arguments and much of the fragments of this project not only challenges how and why meanings are produced from an epistemic position, but it also plays a crucial role in identifying the effects of these binaries which in turn has the power to challenge assumptions around gender and bodily binaries being natural, unchanging, and necessary. The fluidity of gender and bodies then becomes possible, bringing with it the possibility for resistance and subversion (Bhabha, 1995). As the themes of binaries and resistance are central to the project in its scope and methodology, postmodern thinking around binaries offers considerable capacity to explore these themes and reconfigure the strains within feminism characterised by slippages into essentialism especially in considering the notion of women and their bodies.

Postmodern feminism has been influential in the field of feminist epistemologies and has made a significant contribution to the framing of feminist research. Through shedding light on the strategies of domination inherent to enlightenment beliefs especially around objectivity, postmodern feminism offers a sound critique of the essentialist ways of knowing about women's lives which constrict and constrain how we can claim to know anything. However, because of the importance placed on deconstructing categories, the category 'woman' faces the

danger of becoming obsolete, meaning that women cannot exist in ways that have been meaningful and useful to feminism throughout history. To further this critique, if the identity categories that provide people with different standpoints are purely discursive constructions, then theoretically there can be no 'differences' between people from which to understand their lives. For example, gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, are all constructions embedded within discourse rather than material markers of identity. Although this deconstruction is evidently crucial in shifting the idea away from identities being pre-given and essential into understanding social positions as constructed within historical moments by subjects who continually constitute themselves through discourse, it only accounts for one aspect of the reality of women's lives. Giving ontological primacy to discourse, postmodernism lacks a serious engagement with the extra-discursive. As Cain (1993) suggests, there is something more than discourse working to explain women's lives. From this perspective, placing emphasis on discourse can only contribute to a partial way to know about women, the same way that privileging material experience ignores the discursive elements of women's experiences.

Materiality, and the experiences of the material conditions of women's bodies has been a core component of a feminist politics. Whilst the distinction between materiality and discourse is a significant contributor to the struggles between postmodernism and feminism, Judith Butler (1993) urges that the materiality of our bodies is itself socially constituted and given meaning through discourse. Bodies are social, their materiality can only be experienced through the discourses which outline what flesh is, what it means, and why. Bodies according to Butler are not independent of discourse, rather discourse brings bodies into meaning. This reconciliation between schools of thought pushes the boundaries about what can be known about women and their bodies. Understanding bodies as socially constituted means that new questions can be asked about truths about women's bodies are told. This has been particularly productive for feminists in unmasking how embodiment has been made to appear natural through how knowledge about bodies has been produced in binary terms. Building on the work of Cain (1993), Comack (1999, 294) further attempts to reconcile feminism and postmodernism through establishing a symbiosis between feminist standpoint theory and postmodernism which 'involves acknowledging that there are experiences which women encounter in their lives (the 'non-discursive') as well as women's ways of making sense of those experiences and their effects (the 'discursive'). This approach aims to understand a more holistic view on the theory of knowledge as it relates to women, whilst being careful as to not construct a distinction

between thought and experience by understanding that women's standpoints will be constituted by social contexts, histories, and cultures which can only ever be a partial way of knowing about women's lives. As shown, the materiality of bodies is a specific site of gendered difference, politics, and violence for women and for many feminisms this remains a delicate and emotional concept.

Stanley and Wise (1990) offer valuable insight in arguing that locating women's lives within the flow of gender, race, and class relations does not mean that we take those categories as essential, but they provide the basis to make sense of women's lives as women themselves understand their experiences. If women share experiences within these constructions, this does not mean they share the same experiences, rather they share common experiences which can be used to create ways of knowing that interrogate the discursive constructions of those categories as well as aid political organising to challenge the sexism inherent to the ways those categories have been produced. Incorporating the term 'feminist standpoints', Stanley and Wise (1990) offer a wider notion of the traditional 'standpoint' which provides space for numerous feminisms. This framing also provides the space to understand that women may share commonalities relating to oppression, but no woman experiences this in the same way. There are ways of speaking with women about their experiences whilst recognising the socially constructed nature of their experiences and interrogating the discursive power in the language we use to talk and know about those experiences.

Drawing on postmodern epistemological frameworks is especially important and useful to my research as it relates to art and women's art practice. Beyond being an influence on women's art from the 1980s and providing a new ontology (Cottingham, 1989), postmodernism understands art as 'not just a means to truth, but also a way of questioning the desire for truth' (Felski, 2000, 183). Art, as a postmodern feminist social practice, can then be conceptualised as occupying its own epistemic position built upon the questioning of identities. The power of art lies within its ability to subvert truths, and when this is in conversation with feminism, its ability to estrange us from truths around gender (Rose, 1986). Through critical engagement with the postmodern epistemological underpinnings of feminist art practice and aesthetics, this research can further work on making explicit the workings of ideology. In this sense, feminist postmodern epistemologies have a direct and strong affiliation with art practice and aesthetics which will be further explored within my research through the exploration of women's art in digital contexts, and digital feminist artist's experiences of digital spaces.

In looking to the ways in which women's art has become known we have to look to the disciplines which have produced these knowledges and understand their positionality in relation to dominant social structures. It is well documented, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, that women have historically had little access to art institutions in the form of formal training, access to social and financial independence in order to pursue art, and they have been systematically excluded from narratives of art history (Pollock, 2003; Parker and Pollock, 2013). This is because women, known through dominant discourses, are incompatible with the construction of the figure of the artist as genius (Chadwick, 2002). Built on scientific ideas around the naturalising of material sexual difference, the artist was positioned as a rational, controlled, and learned man whose art was an expression of genius. As knowledge of women understood femaleness to be the opposite of those identifiers, women were excluded from these narratives of artist. In order to establish visibility for women artists, feminist art history and feminist art criticism demanded a re-examination of aesthetic criteria, therefore producing new knowledges about women and the art that they produce. By building a case which clearly outlays the importance of the inclusion of women artists into narratives and art institutions, feminist art historians and critics demonstrate that there are concrete aesthetic qualities to understand women's art.

Moreover, the history of art can be understood as 'a history of men looking at women, of female bodies being objectified, exoticized, and entombed in works of art' (Felski, 2000, 177). Women's bodies, like women artists, take on a marginal position which is not only based on a lack of opportunity or resources, but is also reinforced through evaluations of aesthetic value. To challenge how women and their bodies are known from this perspective, a 'feminist aesthetic' has been constructed. As noted in chapter two, feminist aesthetics rests on the experiences of women (Hein, 1993), which is often rooted in embodiment and focuses on the body as a site of social and political struggle. Whilst a unified feminist aesthetic has increased the visibility of women artists and highlighted an inherently sexist institution, this familiar feminist aesthetic raises important questions regarding the epistemic position from which we come to understand women's lives in the context of art. The conflation of female and feminist means that all art produced by women is seen to be subversive and expressive of a shared female essence producing a metanarrative which in itself can be considered phallocentric (Felski, 2000). This stems from an epistemological basis that relies on the scientific framing of women as having naturalised sexual differences to men. For example, the recognition that women's art reflects personal women's experiences is a specific historical way of thinking

about art. Furthermore, this rests on the assumption that women are naturally more responsible for emotional management, as feminist art asks us questions about how we feel and how we think, and how the art relates to our own personal experiences in the world (Lehrer, 2011).

3.5 Conclusion

It is important for this research to work from a postmodern feminist epistemological position in order to articulate the pluralities and fragmentations between women themselves and the digital art that they produce within this project. This is important because it encourages a continued careful consideration of the epistemology at the core of this work. A feminist approach to digital art cannot be singular as there is no unified notion of woman, of women's art, or of a specific politics. Because our knowledges about feminist art practice mainly stem from art history and feminist art criticism rest on taken-for-granted understandings of 'woman', starting from postmodernism enables the view that women's art can and does exist outside of the parameters of binary structures to ensure that within this project, difference can be explored within a feminist context.

The discussions throughout this chapter form an essential part of this project overall. Taking the time to recognise and evaluate different feminist epistemological positions has grounded my own methodologies within a feminist critique of positivism and this has been significant in the development of my own epistemological position which I have outlined in this chapter. Whilst this chapter is therefore crucial in terms of the feminist epistemology inherent to my research, the discussions throughout this chapter are also significant to my methodology in regards to researching the digital. This chapter has enabled me to highlight key values of feminist epistemology that feed directly into my methodological design: reflexivity, power, and resistance. This chapter is therefore important in foregrounding the ways in which I mobilise these key epistemological values in researching experiences of digital spaces through my methodology.

My research is embedded within digital spaces. As Michailidou (2018) notes, the digital field is so complex in that it is vast, it is comprised of multiple processes and multiple actors, and it is both global and local. She goes on to highlight how because of this complexity it is impossible, and unwise, to designate a single method or methodological approach to studying the experiences of digital spaces. In highlighting the usefulness of feminist epistemology in thinking about digital methods and methodology, Michailidou (2018) argues that pre-digital methods which are grounded in feminist epistemology, such as interviewing, are just as

pertinent in a digital setting today as they were historically because they encourage further complexity. Whilst she acknowledges that feminist epistemology does not offer a neat solution to researching in digital contexts, she positions this as a benefit, suggesting that feminist epistemology encourages complexities and creativity which allows us as researchers to continue questioning and exploring how we experience the digital. My methodology, as will be explored further in the following chapter, continues to raise new questions and examine new experiences, that of digital feminist artists, by employing these tenets of feminist epistemology.

Further, Linabary and Hamel (2017) identify the need for a deeper understanding of the implications of feminist epistemology and methodology on research into the digital, based on an expansion of interest in digital research amongst feminist scholars. They offer an account of how feminist epistemology can be mobilised and operationalised in a digital setting by discussing their experiences of feminist online interviewing. In their research, they used asynchronous email interviewing to research women's experiences with voice and (dis)empowerment. Within this they demonstrate how by incorporating the digital into feminist research we can actually more effectively 'engage women's experiences, disrupt power hierarchies in the research process, and produce a more reflective/reflexive interview than more traditional approaches' (Linabary & Hamel, 2017, 99). Although my own methods differ from theirs, Linabary and Hamel (2017) highlight the relevance of a thorough engagement with feminist epistemology in considering how methodological choices, particularly pertaining to digital spaces and experiences, can have significance for how feminist epistemic values are practiced through method.

In terms of my own methodologies, I use synchronous online interviews to research the experiences of digital feminist artists. The discussions throughout this chapter are therefore relevant in identifying and recognising the complexity inherent to researching as a feminist, and in highlighting the epistemological values that are central to feminist research. These values of reflexivity, resistance, and power are carried into my methodology where they work in collaboration with the digital spaces in which we are working from. This allows for both recognition and a reconsideration of how feminist ontology and epistemology can be relevant to methodology as a digital element provides new avenues to mobilise feminist epistemology.

The following chapter will explore the methodological implications of my epistemological approach to research as they relate to my research with digital feminist artists. As well as outlining the specific techniques used within this research, the following chapter will offer a

reflexive account of the value of those decisions and how they were experienced within the research process by both the participants and myself as the researcher. This will include an exploration of how sampling was undertaken within this research, paying particular attention to the idea that digital feminist artists are a hidden population. The following chapter will also include an account of how interviews were experienced when conducted online in digital spaces, the value that stems from engaging in messy, feminist research, as well as a discussion surrounding analysis methods and ethics.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction & aims

This chapter offers a substantive reading of the amalgamation of the practicalities of conducting this research project stemming from the theoretical and epistemological frameworks which underpin and establish these particular chosen methods. This chapter also includes reflections on what it means, and how it feels, to do feminist research with digital feminist artists. Within this, what follows importantly highlights a central argument to this thesis; how the production of knowledges about women's experiences are always situated within fragmented ideological, political, and theoretical ways of knowing about the world. As such, resistance is at the forefront of the methodological approach to this research. The concept of method within my research serves as a crucial tool to detangle and reconstruct narratives about women and about art, as well as offering ways to usefully operationalise the aims of this project.

The chapter begins by defining the term digital feminist art before detailing the broad aims of the research, weaving these with the ontological, epistemic and theoretical feminist positions from which the notion of research aims themselves are challenged. This critical relationship between feminist epistemology and methodology provides both the grounding and justification for the practicalities of how methods are used and worked into the continuity of the narratives of the project. This leads into a focus on how methodological decisions were made, informing the research design, specifically paying attention to sampling, interviewing in digital spaces, and the use of unstructured interviews. Accompanying these discussions, I draw from my research diary to illustrate the effectiveness and the priority of a reflexive process within social research more broadly, with explicit reference to working with feminism and art spaces.

This project works with digital feminist artists to investigate the emerging intersection of art, feminism, and technology. More specifically, this research explores the experiences of digital feminist artists in the production of their work in order to both highlight their experiences and better understand their negotiations of feminism, art, and digital platforms. In doing this work, I address the following four aims of the research:

1. To critically examine the role of digital technologies within women's art practice and participation
2. to identify ways in which women's digital art engages with feminisms to challenge political and cultural constructions of the body

3. to draw from feminist epistemologies and methodologies in order to critique and challenge institutional notions of doing sociological research

4. to explore to what extent women's digital art constructs and changes contemporary feminist activisms

4.2 Defining digital feminist artists

Within this project, the term digital feminist art refers to art which is conceived of and created in order to explore feminist ideas, and uses digital technologies in order to do this. As well as this, digital feminist art refers to work which is exhibited in online locations and spaces. Digital feminist art takes many different forms and perspectives, the concept of digital feminist art does not describe a genre nor is it reminiscent of a particular time period. Digital art, and feminist art do have specific connotations attached to their branding and exist, at least in terminology, exclusive of the other.

Digital art defines new media creative practices which have emerged with the growth of technology, such as software art and digital installations. The concept of digital art also describes how new media has changed the ways that we produce and engage with more traditionally recognised forms of art such as painting or sculpture. Gere (2010, 19) suggested that 'following the emergence of the idea of the avant-garde in the earlier twentieth century, a wide range of experimental and radical definitions of art have been explored and continue to be explored'. As such, digital art often begins from a desire for change from traditional gallery worlds, and operates outside of institutions. This allows for changing definitions of art, for example code being understood as artistic practice, which revolutionises traditional institutional articulations of what is and what is not art, and ultimately who is or who is not an artist. Although lots of digital or internet art is conceived of from a place of resistance to the institutionalised gallery art worlds, and thus shares similarities in perspective with feminist art, feminist art has been conceptualised very differently.

Feminist art is often used to describe a surge of women's creative work which emerged from the 1970s. In thinking about the art that was produced at that time, it is usually referred to as the first generation of feminist art, and has a reputation for being negatively identified with essentialist thinking about women, with a lot of focus on a fundamental female sexuality and an assumed universalism (Solomon-Godeau, 2007). Reputation aside, feminist art of the time varied considerably, and contributed to historical and political moments. Feminist art was being produced in conjunction with the women's movement firstly because women artists faced

many difficulties in pursuing professional creative careers, and secondly because the type of work that feminists found meaningful to produce were discouraged and excluded from galleries (Fields, 2012). Women artists produced new styles and practices, and used the starting point of their own experiences to explore the subject of women from an entirely new perspective, focusing on issues ranging from pregnancy to violence. Although the literature review details a more thorough understanding of feminist aesthetics, it is important to note here how feminist art has been defined by its legacy rather than its ongoing developments and practice. This gives the sense that feminist art is something that has happened but is not necessarily happening.

This being said, women's art practice, and women's experiences within art spaces are extremely varied and have a rich history in feminist theory. Focusing on the ways in which digital technologies and spaces intersect with notions of the body has been a central tenet of feminist thinking, with Sadie Plant (1996) championing the idea that women's liberation lies within technology, and Gear (2001: 323) arguing that the tools of new media enable women artists to 'foreground the cultural production of bodies, which is necessarily bound up with subjectivity, sexuality, and power'. Since these conversations happened, there has been vast changes in the ways that we use technologies to create, distribute, and engage with art, and there is a growing number of women artists working with online spaces. Within popular culture, the term 'digifeminist' (Kretowicz, 2014) artist has been coined to refer to women artists who use web 1.0 and web 2.0 aesthetics to make art based on self-expression and identity, and blur the boundary of offline and virtual realities. Because of their focus on online cultures emerging from the nineties, and the online platforms where their work is exhibited, the art and artist often have a large online following and play a significant role in popular culture, making them 'cewebrities' (Kretowicz, 2014). Whilst this group of women represents a very specific type of digital feminist art, and positions feminist art as a contemporary cultural practice, it does not necessarily capture the nuances within a field of women artists who work in digital ways and is therefore not the sample of which this project sought to obtain and work with.

This project takes the crux of feminist art, the idea of an aesthetics based upon subjectivity and notes how the emergence of technologies have offered new and different opportunities for feminist art practice, to describe the phenomenon of women artists who make artwork in feminist ways using technologies. This is a broad definition which makes space for different women and different subjectivities, avoiding the essentialist and universal reputation of feminist art. Within this definition, digital feminist artists do not need to be internet famous,

they do not need to subscribe to a particular aesthetic, and they do not need to have a large online following. This definition encompasses histories of art and acknowledges how technologies intersect with feminism in theory and in practice in order to explore the experiences of digital feminist artists.

Before moving on to discuss sampling methods and the interview processes, I want to firstly introduce and describe the women who participated in this project. All of the participants are self-identified women who are also digital feminist artists according to the provided definition above. The decision to work from the basis of self- identified women, rather than placing guidelines on who is or who is not a woman is a core principle of both the type of feminist work that is happening within this research, and is central to the aims of the research especially aim 3: to draw from feminist epistemologies to critique and challenge institutional notions of doing sociological research. This feminism is trans and non-binary inclusive and resists subscribing to heteronormative ideals surrounding gender expressions and identities. In this regard, *woman* here refers to anyone who identifies with woman as an aspect of their self-identity. Within this, I am influenced by Anne Byrne's (2003) work which focuses on developing an empirical model for understanding how self-identification for women is useful for research. In this work, she makes the distinction between self and social identities, suggesting that social identities are made up of social structures, ideologies, group identifications, and values and stigmatised identities, whereas self-identities are comprised of our personal sense of self outside of how we are categorised by others. She argues that gender is deeply implicated in the composition of self-identity and is entangled with social identities. However, she suggests that by placing more emphasis on self-identification, this loosens the ties with social identities which ultimately enables researchers to articulate new and different conceptions of womanhood beyond social identities. In this way, working from the notion of self-identity means that self-identification is an arena in which agency and resistance can develop especially around ideas of gender. Therefore, it is important that this research implemented self-identification because it allows an inherent critique of a gender binary which seeks to maintain distinctions between conceptions of men and women, which speaks to the third aim of the research. Embedding this critique into the design of the research from the outset is important because it contributes to the wider notion of resistance that I develop throughout the thesis. Moreover, all of the women involved self-identify as feminists. Although in our interviews, they each had complex, challenging, and wavering identifications with feminist

politics, being a feminist was something that was central to their everyday lives and to their work.

The final sample comprises of sixteen women. All of the women have an online presence through either social media or their artist websites. This was central to the research as this is how potential participants were initially identified and contacted. Whilst some had a much larger presence than others, all of the women were present within digital spaces. Moreover, although all of the participants are self-identified women and self-identified feminists, there are differences amongst them. Ages ranged from between twenty-three and fifty, and they are geographically dispersed, but mainly clustered around large cities. Four women at the time of conducting the interviews were based in London, three were based in Berlin, one based in Amsterdam, one based in Paris, one based in Milan, one in Vancouver, one in Los Angeles, one in Houston, one in Atlanta, and two in New York City. Whilst this is where they were based at the time of the research, some moved frequently or moved between two cities often. I did not ask demographic questions prior to interviews, but during the interviews we did sometimes speak about class, race, and sexuality as well as gender. All of the participants are white women, which is something that I reflect on later in this chapter. Not all participants spoke about their class identifications, but those who did felt that their class identity was important to how they experience art spaces as well as their subject interests. For example, one participant based in London, Jenna, spoke at length about how her working-class background informs her interest in exploring marginalised women's identities in her artwork. Further, Sadie, who is based in Vancouver expressed how she considers class to be central to the art world and we discussed how she understands her identity as a working-class woman means that she feels she cannot access certain spaces within the art world. So, whilst class was not something that I aimed to investigate with this research, it was important to some of the women who positioned themselves as working class. Similarly some participants spoke about their queerness as it is central to their experiences of the world. Three participants, Nicola, Jenna, and Sadie, called themselves queer and others talked with me about exploring sexuality both in their lives and in their work, as will be discussed in the following chapters, particularly chapter seven. As such, most participants did not define or label their sexuality outside of those who clearly identified themselves as queer. Whilst this research does not aim to investigate these identity categories explicitly, it is important to understand how these women's experiences of producing digital feminist art are situated within the intersections of these identities.

With regards to the work that they did, my participants varied in styles. Participants worked in a range of mediums including digital photography, digital drawing and illustration, digital collage, 3D animation, web3 projects, and augmented reality. My participants also varied in the subject matter and topics that they focused on, but they all explored major themes such as experiences of the body and sexuality, femininity, and popular culture including online and internet cultures. All participants named their work as feminist. Some of my participants are self-taught but the majority (eleven participants) have studied art to degree level, and five of the women have, or were completing at the time of the interview, master's degrees. Most participants made a living from commercial projects for music videos and fashion brands alongside their commissioned work. Three participants teach courses on fine art or digital photography at colleges and universities, one participants works as a scout and talent manager for a modelling agency, and two participants work as curators.

4.3 Identifying digital feminist artists

In order to meet the aims, this research project required a very particular sample of digital feminist artists. In wanting to work with women artists in order to explore their experiences of producing digital feminist art in digital contexts, it was appropriate that a sample comprised of women artists who produce or exhibit their work using digital methods. Salganik and Heckathorn (2004) named artists as a hidden population, and whilst the field of digital feminist art was a phenomenon of which I was aware before coming to the research, it was difficult to know ways in which to sample a population from which there was no measure of the scope in both theoretical and geographical terms, of its population. Here I detail the nuances of the field of digital feminist artists and explore the multiple ways in which participants in this field are hard to reach, consistently exposing the relations of power which situate these women. The following section also justifies the employment of online purposive theoretical sampling in order to access a hidden population, and recounts the practicalities of this method.

4.3.1 A hidden population

Broadly, a hidden population can be defined by the wide geographic dispersion of participants and a lack of official statistics concerning the group (Baltar & Gorjup, 2012). These conditions mean that there is often no sample frame from which to use a specific sampling method, and there is no way to locate or localise a target group. This makes hidden populations difficult to access within sociological research because they are often not known to the researcher before the research begins due to their lack of visibility in public or social life (Jeffri, Heckathorn &

Spiller, 2011). Hidden or hard to reach populations have been of interest particularly to social science research due to their association with social phenomena which is generally under represented, where members of the social group have little access to power or resources, therefore often don't have a voice. Historically, researchers have identified hidden populations to exist where the topics they are studying are sensitive or illegal. Salganki and Heckathorn (2004) helpfully compile a list of named hidden population groups which include sex workers, homeless people, drug users, undocumented people, and men who have sex with men. May (2000) explores how some populations are unwilling to risk social exposure because of the sensitive nature of the worlds they are involved in, and Goode (2000) demonstrates in her study of drug and alcohol using mothers, that deviating from social constructions of prescriptive gendered expectations can make certain populations, especially women, particularly vulnerable and difficult to access. This understanding is crucial as it considers not only the difficulties researchers would have in accessing certain groups, but also deepens an understanding as to why participants in such groups may not want to be accessed. In confronting the issues which maintain hidden populations' position on the margins of social life, we learn that whilst researchers have much to gain from accessing hidden populations, often the participants who embody the research topics have much to lose.

A deepening awareness of the social status of hidden populations encouraged this project to view feminist digital artists as women who occupy a unique position within social life and within art worlds and spaces. Although artists may not appear on the surface to be part of a group which is sensitive or illegal, there are a number of distinctive factors about the position of artists which justify their hidden-ness. In their study of ageing visual artists in New York City, Jeffri, Heckathorn and Spiller (2011) conveniently identified a number of challenges in recruiting a sample of the population of ageing artists in New York. Firstly, they note how most artists are self-employed and work in private studios for private clients, meaning that there are no employment records to use as a sample frame (see also Keegan, 2005). Further, if such a list did exist, this would only allow sight of artists who work in a professional capacity, contributing to the institutionalisation of creative practice and further marginalising those who produce art from and at the margins without professional representation. Secondly, the authors recognise how art markets are often driven by inter-artists contacts who form specific organisations. Recruiting participants from such organising bodies would have ensured a large sample for the research, but would only account for artists who affiliate themselves with organisations, and the authors were cautious to not only reach a sample of 'the most marketable

artists, the most famous, the most vocal ageing artists, or only those artists who join particular organisations' (Jeffri, Heckathorn & Spiller, 2011, 21). Although these issues highlight an issue of bias, an issue which will be addressed in following sections, they also speak to the unique position that artists hold as a hidden population. Interestingly, from their final sample, the authors conclude that 60.8% of the women artists expressed feeling discriminated against in their profession, informing the intersections of identity which suggest that gendered experiences contribute to a deepening of their hidden identity.

Women artists who engage with digital feminist art practice are considered within my research as a specific hidden population for a number of reasons relating to the intersecting identity of artist and feminist. Firstly, feminist art is extensively associated with protest and is purposefully provocative. Much of the purpose of feminist art lies within its abilities to provoke reactions in order to enact social change for women and other marginalised people. Historically, feminist work has intentionally been overtly political in order to explore issues such as reproductive rights, representation, discrimination, and patriarchal capitalism (Arruda, 2011). As a direct threat to established convention, feminist protest art is fraught with sanction. For example, members of the feminist punk-art group Pussy Riot were arrested after staging a performance on the altar of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, in which they attacked the alliance of the Church and state which hinders women's rights in Russia by performing a punk song and circulating the video online (Mason, 2018). Similarly, women's rights activists in Hong Kong were arrested and detained in 2014 for their involvement in action entitled *Protest. Female Bodies. Future*, which saw women use photography to upload nude photographs of themselves onto social media sites in support of sexual pleasure and anti-abuse legislation (Jacobs, 2016). Following this, Jacobs (2016) points out how this particular movement also led to a nationwide ban on mainland universities of feminist education or discourses. These examples express the hostile spaces that feminist art occupies in relation to political social life, as well as the harsh sanctions that feminist artists experience in a battle with authorities, and the heavy weight that women artists bare in their desire for social change. It is then understandable why many feminist digital artists would prefer to remain anonymous when entrenched in such political situations, thus heightening their status as a hidden population.

Secondly, women are routinely excluded from tradition art spaces and institutions, meaning that they may not have ever been professionally represented, so have not been considered part of the institution of art. This lack of representation and visibility in mainstream art spaces is the product of an art history which has systematically ignored women's practice. Parker and

Pollock (2013) expose how sexist attitudes and stereotypes about women have been used to rationalise women's exclusion from writings on art, and as such, a historical artistic landscape. This clear disparity in how men's and women's art has been understood translates into what is and what is not represented in specific art spaces. Bermingham (2000) argues that this issue rests on the assumption that women's art has become categorised as craft as a result of art being so heavily gendered. The Guerrilla Girls famously and provocatively called attention to the lack of gallery space dedicated to women artists in leading art institutions. As Raizada (2007) notes, art worlds are male dominated arenas of culture. In understanding how women artists have historically been written out of art history and are not awarded physical space within art institutions, we can see how women artists are quite literally hidden from the spaces in which their work could inhabit. To add another layer to this invisibility, women artists who work digitally do not have dedicated spaces with a legacy in the art world in which to exhibit their work. Much of their work lives on personal websites or social media, making it increasingly hidden amongst the plethora of information online.

4.3.2 Sampling

Since outlining how women who make digital feminist art are a hidden population, the most appropriate sampling technique for this project was purposive, theoretical sampling with reference to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) advocacy of grounded theory. Although sampling methods can often be an overlooked component of the research process (Mason, 2002), they are in themselves very telling of the types of knowledge that will be constructed and are completely bound within relations of power which has persistently been an issue for feminist researchers.

Within this project, sampling was an ongoing, reflexive process of moving in and out, and within, the field. As already outlined, as a hidden population, there was no sample frame to draw from or no physical geographical location to visit in order to attract a sample. Therefore, sampling within this project became a series of reflexive decisions. To begin a sampling process, I used online search engines to learn of online feminist art exhibitions, online women's art platforms, and artist's websites. By spending time searching the field, I identified women artists who participated in online art spaces, who named themselves as feminist artists, and who had email contact details available. Initial emails were sent to all identified artists inviting them to participate in the research project and outlining the expectations of being involved in sociological research. This happened in two distinct phases that were separated by time and reflection. Within the first phase, forty-eight women were sent an email invitation, of which

eleven responded asking for further information. From this point, and after having conversations with these women over email about the scope of the project and the reasons this research was being conducted, nine accepted the invitation to interview. After conducting these nine interviews and transcribing them over a three-month period, it felt appropriate to create a second phase of sampling in order to hear more voices from this diverse and emerging field. In the second phase, fifty-two women were identified and contacted, of which ten accepted, and ultimately another seven interviews were conducted.

This second phase of the sampling process was unsuccessful in that even following the second phase, all of my participants were white women centred in Europe and North America, meaning that my final sample following the second phase did not change in terms of diversity or representativeness, only that I now had *more* participants. On reflection, perhaps a different sampling technique could have been utilised in the second sampling process to make further efforts to obtain a more diverse sample. For example, the second phase of sampling could have included snowball sampling, where I could have asked the participants who I was already working with if they could identify or recommend other digital feminist artists who might like to take part in my research. Whilst there is a chance that the inclusion of snowball sampling would have generated a more diverse and representative sample, as Erickson (1979) notes, when sampling a hidden population using snowball or chain-referral techniques, there will always be a bias because the initial participants can never be random. Erickson (1979) argues that as the snowball sample grows, further unknown biases will be present within the sample which the researcher may be unaware of. Moreover, Heckathorn and Jeffri (2001) identify further biases in using snowball sampling with a hidden population. They recognise how some initial participants will be part of larger personal networks than others, so the participants that stem from some personal networks will be over represented and smaller networks under represented. So, whilst a second sampling phase could have used snowball sampling in an effort to obtain a more representative and diverse sample, this too would have come with a multitude of challenges to navigate. Overall, whilst the second sampling phase did not meet its aims directly, I do recognise it as a positive aspect of the methodology in that it generated a wider range of participants taking part in the research. Although a large sample size is not the aim of this research, a larger sample did allow for a wider variety of voices within this space to be heard which ultimately allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences, thoughts, and values of this sample. The participants who entered the research during this second phase added

richness to this research via their contributions. In this sense, both phases of purposive sampling generated a sample appropriate for my research.

Identifying digital feminist artists by their participation and existence in online art spaces is typical of purposive sampling more generally, a sampling technique which is popular amongst qualitative social research as it allows sampling to encompass participants within the fields which the project aims to research. In other words, purposive sampling is a broad term which describes all types of sampling which is conducted with reference to the goals and research questions of the project. Different types of purposive sampling exist, and one particular form, theoretical sampling, is the method that this project identifies with the most. Theoretical sampling is understood to be part of the process of a grounded theory approach, whereby the researcher simultaneously collects, codes, and analyses the data whilst constantly deciding on what types of data need to be collected next and where and how to sample more participants. This dynamic and reflexive type of sampling is always in flux and always responsive to emerging theory as it is constructed from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Advocating theoretical sampling due to its strong relationship and reference to grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that theoretical sampling enables the construction of categories of social life whilst still creating opportunity to sample, thus better allowing the construction of grounded theory. This quest for generating theoretical understandings of specific fields and aspects of social life is what makes theoretical sampling most appropriate for this research project.

From a feminist perspective which underpins this project, the generation and construction of theoretical understandings of social life for women is the purpose of doing feminist research (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Grounded theory as a wider concept has a longstanding complementary relationship to feminism and a grounded theory approach has been noticed as compatible with the pursuits of feminist research due to the willingness to locate theory within the worlds of women's experiences (Morley, 1996). Inviting women to participate in this project through directly identifying them within the field of interest helps to operationalise the fundamental aims of the project, which are to challenge objective ways of knowing about women. Starting with the voices and experiences of women within a particular field, in this case digital feminist art spaces in order to generate knowledges about them, acts as a direct challenge to positivist ways of knowing, which have historically produced authorised knowledge about women without hearing women's experiences. From the outset, this project aimed to work qualitatively with digital feminist artists about their experiences of the field, and following a feminist epistemic standpoint, did not intend to obtain evidence for pre-established theory. Theoretical

sampling allowed the project to work with women who were invested in constructing meaningful theoretical knowledges of their experiences, reconciling method with feminist epistemology.

However more recent feminist thinking has argued that a grounded theory approach, including theoretical sampling, is not necessarily as free from deductive thinking as intended (Maynard, 1994; Stanley & Wise, 1990). This is because no research, regardless of its epistemic underpinnings, can ever be without politics because the researcher is situated with their own culture, history and politics, their own way of knowing about the world. Although a more thorough discussion of positionality in relation to this research is detailed in following sections, it is worth noting here that the position of the researcher was something that needed to be reflected upon during sampling process. As someone with prior knowledge of the field due to an interest in feminist digital artwork outside of research, I was already aware of some platforms which exhibited women's art online, and I was aware of specific artists who worked digitally with feminist themes. Upon beginning sampling, I went to the spaces that I was already familiar with, which helped to lead into different spaces of which I was unaware. My prior knowledge of the field was culturally specific and based on my own gendered and classed experiences of art and online space.

During the first phase of sampling, I found that a lot of the artists I was trying to connect with were white and based in Europe and America. On reflection, this is likely to have happened because my history of feminism, as a white British woman, is decorated by feminist artwork of the period of women's liberation and this has cultivated my understanding of feminist art today. Namely, my cultural understanding of the diverse field of digital feminist art and artists was foregrounded in middle class, white, western knowledges inscribed upon my own identity. In this, I was imposing my own westernised ideas about what feminist art was and is through who I identified as being part of a field of digital feminist artists, and this would ultimately impact the knowledge that would be constructed, which potentially has harmful consequences especially in terms of representation.

Noticing how my identity and position as researcher impacted sampling decisions, and taking the space to reflect upon this, the second phase of sampling was a more conscious attempt to be more representative of the field, not out of a desire for generalisability, but instead for a desire to challenge problematic knowledges emerging from white feminism, and construct a more authentic account of the intersections and complexities within the field of digital feminist

artists. As argued by Letherby (2003), feminist research will always work from what has come before it, adding layers of complexity and challenging different perspectives, ultimately providing critiques and modifications of theory that already exists. This short reflection on decisions made during the sampling process helps to understand how no research is completely inductive, and therefore no pure theory can emerge from a specific sample, because that sample is already grounded in a theory. Theoretical sampling helped in focusing on a field to reconcile the themes of the research with feminist politics, and also illustrates how a rigorous reflexive process is necessary throughout the whole research process in order to construct meaningful knowledges.

Although slightly critical of the general concept of grounded theory, theoretical sampling does allow space for reflection which was useful within this project. In wanting to hear experiences of feminist digital artists and having no pre planned expectations of what a sample would look like, it was difficult to know when to stop sampling and interviewing. Theoretical sampling is a process which moves backwards and forwards between sample and theoretical reflection until there is satisfaction that theoretical saturation has been achieved. This means reaching a point whereby the sample that has already been interviewed has provided the basis of categories which are important to the research aims or questions (Bryman 2012), and there is no need to continuing to gather data. At this point, the researcher should move on to thinking through coding and categorising the data and how to organise it in meaningful ways. Within this project, theoretical saturation was reached after sixteen interviews. This decision was made following the understanding from Charmaz (2006) that the researcher should stop sampling and researching when new data would no longer stimulate new ideas regarding theory or concepts. When I was confident that patterns had been established between participants' experiences through the interview process, it was evident that theoretical saturation had been reached. Similar to Allan (2011), after sixteen interviews I was aware that no new concepts or themes were emerging, and I was able to identify strong emerging themes from the data.

Reaching the point of theoretical saturation was a complex moment within the research process, whereby as the researcher I had to walk what seemed like a fine line between being authentic in each unstructured interview, whilst also having the knowledge of previous interviews in mind. This deliberation of wondering how much I was unconsciously guiding the participants to certain topics because I had already begun identifying and constructing patterns and themes from previous interviews, was difficult to navigate. It was challenging to be both a feminist researcher who is keen to hear women's different experiences and also a student, who wants

her research project to 'work' and be meaningful as to help to improve the experiences of women in some way (Duelli Klein, 1983). Navigating multiple identities is something that this chapter discusses in following sections, however this did feel pertinent at the time of sampling. A grounded theory approach, as we have seen, allows the researcher to contemporaneously sample, interview, and analyse data; whilst this has many benefits for feminist research, there must be some contemplation of how this reflexive process impacts the interviews themselves. Because of the unstructured nature of the interviews in this project, the women did speak of what was important to them and their experience of being feminist digital artists and I did reach a point where patterns were strong, and themes were emerging. However, there had to be moments of serious reflection around this stage to ask if the process of moving backwards and forwards between sampling and interviewing and analysing was useful at all in constructing genuine, or meaningful knowledges about the experiences of feminist digital artists. I wanted to be careful not to introduce concepts in interviews which the interviewee had not already used, and not ask any leading questions relating to the patterns that were already emerging. This was mainly mitigated by encouraging the women to be involved with the project beyond their interview. All the women could access their transcript so that they could reflect on the conversation and add any details which they did not mention. This stage of the research process was incredibly helpful in reaching a point of theoretical saturation and will be discussed later in this chapter.

After sixteen interviews it was felt that no new themes or concepts were emerging from the interview analysis and that the sampling process could conclude, allowing for deeper analysis of themes. A small sample size was a conscious decision based on a feminist ontology and epistemology which outline the importance of hearing specific and different women's voices, rather than generalising to an unproductive concept of 'women'. Robinson (2014) helpfully outlines guidance on sample sizes and recommends a sample of between three and sixteen participants, using the advice of Robinson and Smith (2010), who note that this range provides enough scope for the research to construct cross interview patterns and themes, whilst not being so large that the project becomes overwhelmed with data, thus not able to properly give space to each voice within the research. Working with a small sample means that the researcher has the space and capacity to permit individuals within the sample their own sense of identity, as opposed to being consumed by a larger whole. This idea of hearing individual voices was paramount to this project which worked with postmodernism to challenge the categorisation of woman as a unified term, preferring to notice and hear about differences that exist between the

fragments of oppression which this sample embody (see Hill Collins, 1994; hooks 1984). Therefore, theoretical sampling was most appropriate for this project as the flexible approach to sampling allowed different voices to be heard and valued as individual whilst also contributing to broader feminist discourse.

This being said, a sample size of sixteen could be considered too small especially if the research was aiming to be generalisable to a wider population. However, from the outset, this project has never been interested in constructing generalisable results, preferring instead to create meaningful dialogue between women and challenge knowledges about women. Validity has more importance within this project. Yardley (2000) notes how validity rests on the adequacy of the sample and the rigour of the sampling process. She argues that the adequacy of the sample does not hinge on the sample size, but rather how the sample relates to the field of study and its ability to supply all of the information necessary to construct a comprehensive analysis. It is difficult, and somewhat unnecessary, to measure in what ways this sample relates to the field more broadly. This is because the field of digital feminist artists is not a visible or measured field in itself, as previously discussed. However, I am suggesting here that the way that the women in this project were invited to take part in the research means that they not only relate to the field, but they are actively constructing the boundaries of that field. Through emailing invitations to women artists who participated in digital art worlds means that the women already identified themselves as artists, and they were encouraged to ask questions and discuss the project before agreeing to take part. These initial conversations with participants were instrumental in helping to decide if they identified themselves as digital feminist artists in relation to how the project was defining digital feminist artists. Together we learned that this is a dynamic and emerging field, and therefore we can see that the sampling technique of theoretical sampling did provide the means to produce valid accounts of the experiences of participants.

Overall, purposive, theoretical sampling was the most useful and appropriate sampling method to use for this project because of its relationship to grounded theory, and its flexibility in allowing the space for reflection in relation to theories being constructed as well as the types of voices that are heard. In beginning to outline the relationship between feminist epistemology and the methods used here, I hope to draw out and discuss the complexities of doing feminist research, and contribute to discourse which attempts to ascertain what exactly a feminist methodology might look like.

4.4 Interviewing

4.4.1 A qualitative approach

Feminist researchers generally favour a qualitative approach to researching the lives of women. This project conducted unstructured interviews with sixteen digital feminist artists, and the decision to conduct interviews, a qualitative method, was a conscious and purposeful one based on relevant epistemic understandings.

Qualitative social research encompasses a plethora of methods including ethnographies, life histories, focus groups, and interviews which have been considered to be most relevant and important to feminist modes of researching. Historically, feminist researchers have favoured qualitative approaches to social research as a more epistemologically appropriate method of hearing women's voices which have been systematically and intentionally silenced (DeVault and Gross, 2012). Using qualitative methods is important to feminist researchers because it acts as a direct critique of positivism and the scientific paradigm of discovering objective truths. Considered a term of abuse for feminist ways of knowing, positivism uses a framework of subject/object to structure how knowledge is produced, meaning that the 'object' is always studied as distinct from the researcher who can look at the object in value free ways to take truths away from the knower (object) in the name of objectivity (Giddens, 1978). Furthermore, Reinharz (1984) asserts that positivistic research relies heavily on a rape model. Researchers take something away from their subjects without any consideration of the relations of power embodied within the research relationship, and the assumption is that there is a right to know on the behalf of the researcher, making the researched purely an object of masculinist consumption who is ultimately dehumanised through their simplification into numerical form. Quantitative research is therefore intrinsically exploitative due to its epistemological origins. Although there is a clear focus on qualitative methods throughout, as resistance to the scientific paradigm, this is not to say that feminist researchers do not work in quantitative ways. There are ways to research the lives of women using quantitative methods which are sympathetic to feminism in the sense that they highlight gendered inequalities through statistics which can be useful to aiding political change (Reinharz, 1992).

As important as it is to challenge traditional masculinist ways of knowing and doing research, it is also important to be cautious of advocating a distinct separation of qualitative and quantitative methods from each other as this only causes problems in the assumed collective feminist goal of constructing an emancipatory political movement for women, and further

reinforces a binary which this project aims to purposefully disrupt. The qualitative/quantitative divide is problematic because it positions qualitative and quantitative methods as polar opposites, constructing a new binary from which to dangerously reinforce gendered relationships. This allows the divide to parallel other dualisms rather than challenge these divisions central to women's oppression such as public/private and objective/subjective. When qualitative methods are posed as an opposition to objective ways of knowing, they are considered the opposite of masculine rationality and sit within the domain of femininity. This contributes to why Oakley (1998) understands methods and methodology as inherently gendered and coins the phrase the 'gendered paradigm divide'. This refers to how the interview becomes a heavily gendered experience because it is bound to gendered characteristics based on the naturalisation of sexual difference.

Taking on the weight of this complex history of feminist thought, and also to meet the needs of this project in relation to its aims, a qualitative approach was deemed to be most appropriate in exploring the experiences of digital feminist artists. More broadly, a qualitative approach to doing this research topic is appropriate because it meets the needs of the purpose of feminist research. Ramazanoglu (1989) argues that part of the purpose of a feminist method is to provide understandings of women's experiences from their own perspectives. Harding (1987) notes how studying women using their own perspective has a limited history in academia, and so the first steps of doing feminist research should be to make the experiences of women visible. In the case of digital feminist artists, there is little known about the experiences of this specific field, and as the literature review shows, art spaces have historically excluded women. Making the experiences of my sample visible was a priority. In order to make these experiences visible outside of pre-determined categories created within an oppressive patriarchal culture, Smith (1988) necessitates beginning research with speaking to real, concrete people about their actual lives in order to rewrite women's experiences, rather than reaffirm dominant ideology about women's experiences in the world. In this sense, to use any quantitative method to research digital feminist artists would be to use the categories and the language of an art world which has, and continues to, oppress and exclude women's points of view. Therefore, a qualitative approach was more useful within this project in order to make digital feminist artists visible.

Not only is it important for feminist research to make women's experiences visible, but it is also important that the research means something to women in ways that could shift the weight of oppression (Mies 1983). Furthering this, some feminist researchers argue that feminist research should be emancipatory, actively seeking ways to challenge oppression rather than

just make visible the experiences of oppression (Kelly, 1994; Cook & Fonow, 1990). This is a position that has been challenged from both feminists and beyond, especially Stanley and Wise (1993) who advocate for research for the sake of knowledge being enough. Within this project, a qualitative approach proved to be meaningful for the women involved as well as being most appropriate in answering the research questions. As much as this project is in no position to undertake the emancipation of women in the world, a qualitative approach gave women the opportunity to talk about their work and their experiences in ways that they have not been able to in other forums. Using qualitative methods was meaningful in that it allowed the research to talk with women, to hear about their experiences and construct a narrative about them. Although this may not break down patriarchal society on a large scale, and as such may not be emancipatory, talking with these women was meaningful in that their experiences were heard, when they work in an industry which historically does not want to listen.

4.4.2 Unstructured interviews as feminist methodology

As stated, this project worked from a qualitative approach by conducting unstructured interviews. Generally, an unstructured interview is defined by its conversation-like style, and its interest in the interviewee's point of view (Bryman, 2012). In this research, conversations stemmed from any questions that the participants had to begin with, and then discussing what was important to participants. I did not use an interview guide, but often began by asking participants to describe their work. All interviews were conducted through FaceTime or Skype, they were all recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were then sent back to participants for reflection. Because of these broad characterisations, as well as other more pointed details which will be discussed throughout this section, unstructured interviews are deemed most appropriate for feminist research, which encompasses this particular research project. For feminists, the unstructured interview as a methodology represents a shift in what it means to do social research, challenging positivistic ways of knowing which are bound to objectivity and truth finding, and adopting a subjective and reflexive approach to constructing knowledge. Symbolically, in depth interviewing is tied to the emergence of feminism within the academy as feminism brought into question the relationship between knowledge and power (Smith, 1988; Collins, 1991).

One of the ways that this relationship is questioned in the unstructured interview is through the researcher being openly communicative with the interviewee. This allows a rapport to be established and nurtured, making the interview a mutually beneficial experience. For Oakley (1981) this could happen by the researcher encouraging the interviewee to ask questions and

answering them honestly. Within my research, most of the interviews started off with the respondents asking questions about the project, and about myself. These questions were the springboard into more in depth conversations, so they required thoughtful and authentic answers. I was asked about the origins of my interests in art and in feminism, I was asked about future plans for the research, about where I lived and my experiences as a student, my identity as a woman, and I had one particularly interesting conversation with one woman upon her being surprised to discover that I am a woman, as she had assumed I was a man based on my name. Offering that space at the beginning of the interviews shifted the balance of power within our relationships. As Oakley (1990) argues, when the researcher gives something of herself through talking about herself and answering questions, this invites a greater sense of intimacy within the research relationship and a greater level of reciprocity. Through working from an unstructured approach and being able to speak with participants openly about the questions that mattered to them, we were able to build a strong rapport which challenges the notion of the interviewee as passive (Letherby, 2003).

The women I spoke with were in control of their experiences because of an unstructured approach which values the flexibility between researcher and researched in which we both talked and listened, meaning that we were both active in the research process. This really shifted the location of power within the research by troubling the hierarchy of knowledge. Scientific methodologies create and reinforce unequal power relations through research processes by placing the researcher as the 'expert' based on epistemic authority. Using the notion of feminist standpoints, Hesse-Biber (2014) argues that in depth interviewing can disrupt these continuations of unbalanced power relations and develop methodological perspectives that place importance on the agency and resistance of participants. The agency of participants in this project was central to the research process, and the rapport that we built together through meaningful conversations based on what the women wanted to speak about meant that the unequal hierarchy was troubled. Both researcher and researched were active in constructing knowledges so that nobody was intentionally positioned as the expert knower.

Although theoretically using an unstructured approach challenges research hierarchy, and this did happen within this project, there were specific interviews in which I was positioned as an expert and it was difficult to rework this traditional relationship. Some of the women I spoke to were well known artists, and frequently agreed to interviews with journalists for magazines, online articles, or blogs, and so their experience of interviews was different to what this project was interested in conducting. As such, we had to negotiate what this interview was going to be

and how we wanted it to work. Some of the women expressed that they were used to providing information about their work and their practice but were not usually asked about their thoughts outside of these parameters. This reinforced the idea that I, as the researcher, held more power over knowledge and it was challenging to construct a meaningful exchange for both people involved in the interview. For example, in some interviews it was typical for participants to make comments such as 'you would know better than me' or 'you probably know a lot more about this than me'. This positioning of the researcher as someone who already holds authority over knowledge firstly re-establishes a hierarchy which rests upon a dominant interviewer and an objectified interviewee.

Secondly, this makes it difficult to establish how the research process can be of benefit to the participants as well as the researcher. This is reminiscent of Collins (1998) who suggests that no interview can be completely unstructured because we arrive at the interview with a set of expectations of what this experience will be. She argues that our awareness of the roles and rules of an interview are based on the fact that the interview is a structured event in itself, and therefore cannot ever be authentically unstructured. Whilst there is no denying that these interviews were born from my own interests and the interviews were set up for the purpose of completing my research, it is unfair to suggest that there can be no freedom from a structure which reinforces hierarchical relationships. For Oakley (1990), the unstructured interview represents a feminist resistance to inequality and exploitation because it puts women's experiences at the forefront of research. In this project having conversations with women about what we both expected from an interview situation helped to challenge what the purpose of interviewing is. These conversations would have been more difficult if the approach were more structured and these negotiations could not have happened because the experiences of the women involved would not be at the forefront of the project. The space to be honest and open about how we could both find the experience meaningful helped to trouble the narrative around structure and this in itself can be beneficial for both researcher and researched.

This negotiation of the interview can be meaningful in ways that might not be expected by general feminist understandings of participatory research. Although Oakley (1990) advocates for the voices of women to be considered valuable knowledges in themselves, and for a non-hierarchical research relationship, having the researcher as a 'knower' can be useful to participants. Letherby (2003) suggests that as researchers, we should acknowledge our intellectual privilege because it would be dishonest to claim that everyone involved in the interview process played an equal role. Ultimately, I designed the project, arranged the

interviews, I have access to more information than participants both institutionally within the discipline and within the data itself, and I will analyse the data according to this knowingness within my field. When speaking about the project as a whole in interview settings, a lot of the women recognised that I would be orchestrating this project, and as inclusive and equal as the project could be, it was known that I would be making ultimate decisions. This was generally welcomed by respondents, who actively recognised my position and spoke about it with me.

After discussing the commercialisation of feminism and how this might have the potential to change the landscape of feminist art, one participant, Jenna, noted how 'these are interesting questions that I think need to be asked and I don't know what the answers are, but that's your job isn't it, you're going to write loads about it'. Albeit with a humorous tone, this clearly set out our roles within the research and allowed us both to position ourselves where we felt comfortable. As Wolf (1996) states, different respondents will want to have different levels of involvement with the research project, sometimes preferring the researcher to speak on their behalf. A lot of the women in this project were interested in what the outcomes of the research would be, and most asked if they would be able to read work that emerged from the project. It was clear that participants found meaning in their experiences being represented, and were eager to learn how this would be written about in future.

Similarly, Scott (1998) recognised that women who she worked with in research projects often felt their accounts of their experiences were inadequate, they were not listened to or believed. In her work, participants wanted their voices to be represented with a different authority, who could claim authority of knowledge on their behalf. In this project, the women I spoke with recognised that the knowledge that we were constructing would be academic knowledge and that came with a level of authority and visibility that as artists, the usually did not access. Through having the chance to speak about our positions in the world within an unstructured interview, we had the chance to recognise what types of knowledges that we produced and with what authority. This led to a helpful distinction between our roles, they are artists who had specific knowledges, and I am a researcher with different specific knowledges. Recognising my own intellectual privilege does not mean that the knowledges that I construct are superior to those of my participants, rather we each sit in different spaces of knowledge production. The unstructured interview is a meeting point within these different spaces where we could negotiate and discuss how different voices can be heard and who should be constructing these knowledges. Although it was difficult to completely disrupt a hierarchy of knowledge, the

unstructured approach meant that we could reframe this power in ways that could be meaningful for both researcher and participants.

Furthering this, enabling participants to decide how much they wanted to participate in constructing knowledges within the research project meant that they had a lot more freedom and control and were not exploited, as is often a critique of unstructured interviews. In depth interviewing has been called out as an exploitative method because it encourages women to speak about experiences that they might not have wanted to discuss, without offering them anything in return (Kelly, 1994), and also because it takes private aspects of women's lives and makes them public (Finch, 1984). This is particularly problematic when working with vulnerable women who have less power within the research process. The women involved in my research were not deemed vulnerable, but there still needed to be consideration around the idea that after collecting data from the unstructured interview, the researcher walks away with ultimate control and the interviewee has given up her power over her stories (Cotterill, 1992).

To mitigate this clear exploitative practice and continue to trouble relations of power within the interview process, my participants were given back their interview transcripts via email once they were completed. Through inviting participants to reflect on the interview we had and encouraging them to make any changes where they felt they wanted to add or change anything, we constructed a more balanced ownership of their words and stories which helped to redefine power within the research relationships as something that was more of a fluxing continuum rather than something fixed to our positions of researcher and researched. The women in this project had the option to decide if they wanted to review their transcripts, some did, and we continued to communicate in order to articulate new ideas that emerged from reflecting on the interviews. Others chose not to add or change anything, they were happy with the conversations that we had, and did not express further interest in being involved. The decision to offer this to participants not only challenges how power operates within the research process, but also extends the boundary of an interview, extending it to beyond the confines of an allocated time slot. This allows for reflection outside of the interview setting which serves to further understand the perspective of participants by valuing their reflections on their words, and encouraging a complex picture to be constructed. As such, a less exploitative process occurs, whereby participants have as much choice and flexibility as possible and the researcher acknowledges reflection as valuable data. This reiterates Charmaz (2006) who points to the unstructured interview being useful because of its flexibility and continuity of thought, leading to a high level of quality information.

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4.4.3 Online interviews as feminist practice

As stated, all interviews were conducted over FaceTime, or using Skype. This was a carefully considered decision based on both theoretical and practical considerations including the geographical location of participants and the safety of both participants and the researcher. Bhavnani and Talcott (2012) stipulate that although digital contexts have much potential for feminist research practice, themes of power and resistance which are central to feminist research, need deeper consideration when it comes to online research. In this section I will outline the considerations that took place in this research, drawing a particular focus to notions of power and resistance. Conducting online interviews posed a number of challenges which I will detail here, but overall I argue that synchronous online face to face interviews can be a useful method for feminist research especially in relation to resistive practice.

Firstly, one of the main benefits of synchronous face to face online interviews is that they allow access to difficult to reach, or hidden, populations (Linabary and Hamel, 2017). I argued in section 4.3.1 of this chapter that digital feminist artists should be considered a hidden population, so online interviews offer the potential for this hidden population to be identified and be listened to in a research context meaning that their voices can be included in the construction of knowledges, where this may have been more difficult with more traditional approaches. Moreover, using online interviews offered the inclusion of a geographically dispersed group of women in this research, and this global reach would not have been possible without the use of online interviews. Therefore, this is useful for feminist research because the inclusion of a wider geographical sample means that a wider range of voices can be included, and this works to resist the reproduction of dominant narratives within social research. By being able to access globally diverse hidden populations, feminist researchers can conceptualise women's experiences with greater attention to differences between women, thus resisting speaking of women as a homogenous group. Doing this means that feminist researchers have the methodological tools necessary to resist the reproduction of narratives about women's lives from dominant, privileged standpoints.

Whilst the inclusion of a geographically diverse sample is a major advantage to online interviewing generally, I am conscious of how successful this was in my research and thus the extent to which it contributes to notions of resistance. Whilst the women who took part in this research do occupy varied social positions, they do also embody privileged social positions. All of the women who participated are white, and all are located in major cities. Their experiences of gender intersect with privilege, and I wonder to what extent I am constructing

an account of digital feminist artists' experiences that is only from the perspective of white women. Furthermore, as a white woman, I question how ethically appropriate it would be for me to construct narratives about women of colour. Whist I appreciate the complexity of embodying varying privileged identities and know that white women are not at all a homogenous group, and I do not want to simplify their experiences, I do worry that this research only amplifies and constructs knowledge that only speaks to experiences of whiteness. As such, the use of online interviews in this context perhaps only reproduces dominant narratives. Although I do still believe that online interviews hold feminist potential surrounding the inclusion of diverse populations beyond this research, a thorough exploration of the researcher's positionality is necessary to resist the reproduction of dominant knowledges.

Another benefit to using online interviews is that they offer more agency for participants which speaks directly to the aims and values of feminist research (James and Busher, 2006). Feminist research is primarily concerned with challenging power imbalances within research settings, and strives to recognise the agency of participants in both research relationships and the production of knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I suggest that online face to face interviews contribute to challenging power dynamics within research contexts by placing the agency of participants at the centre of the research. In my research, participants were able to select times and dates appropriate for them for interviews to take place, meaning that interviews took place at times that did not inconvenience participants, and this allowed flexibility to accommodate any other obligations or day to day events that were happening. Similarly, participants could be in any location in which they felt most comfortable. Most participants were in their home when we spoke, but some were in their workspace or studio space. This meant that participants had agency over where they wanted to be when they spoke to me, rather than needing to be in an unfamiliar location. Kazmer and Xie (2008) describe how giving participants choice and control surrounding how the interviews take place can benefit the research as it can built more authentic rapport and directly challenges power imbalances. Familiarity was also heightened for the women who chose FaceTime to conduct their interviews. One participant, Jenna, noted how using FaceTime meant that she felt more comfortable because it was something that she used often to connect with friends, she reflected on how she was nervous before the interview, but that it just felt like a normal FaceTime call which made her more comfortable. Participants having the ability to control where and when interviews take place means that they can find spaces and technologies which are comfortable for them. In placing their comfort at the centre of the research, this challenges power hierarchies which position the researcher as having the

most control. Expressing this agency meant that participants were more comfortable during the interviews, which not only speaks to feminist ethics in that it minimises potential harms, but also means that power relations are disrupted. Because of this possible disruption of power imbalances which allows greater comfort for participants, online interviews are a useful method for feminist research.

Whilst this sense of agency can be empowering for participants, online interviews also have the potential for reinforcing power hierarchies. This is particularly important when considering access to technologies and language. Online interviews were only viable in my research because participants had access to technologies which enabled their participation. James and Busher (2009) outline how digital divides in material access to technologies mean that online interviews actually restrict who is able to participate. Further, this can contribute to the reproduction of knowledges rooted in the standpoint of those with privileged access to technologies. Similarly, online spaces remain predominantly constructed around the English language which imposes barriers to participation (Newsom and Lengel, 2004). I am conscious that, as an English only speaker, my initial email invitations to participate were only written in English and I searched for participants using only English language. I am aware that this meant that I had unintentionally excluded many women from participating, and ultimately this reinforces a power imbalance as, being the research, I reproduced barriers to access for women, and this sets the direction of what types of knowledges are produced. In future research, a more thorough consideration of barriers to access technologies is necessary for feminist researchers to fully address issues of inclusion and exclusion, which result in the reproduction of dominant narratives and power imbalances.

This being said, for the participants in this research, online interviews did contribute to challenging boundaries particularly through the notion of embodiment. A key concern surrounding online interviews is the potential disembodiment of participants (Illingworth, 2001), but the navigation of embodiment and disembodiment served as a real advantage for my research. Because the project focuses on how feminist artists experience digital space and practices, it felt theoretically appropriate to conduct online interviews. This meant that the experience of thinking through what it means to embody digital spaces was as authentic as possible. During the interviews, we were both experiencing the space that we were discussing, which meant that we could be explicit about how it felt to be experiencing online spaces. Similarly to Taylor (1999), I value online spaces as legitimate, valid sites of embodiment and therefore a valid site of research for discussing embodiment. Further, Van Doorn (2011) argues

that digital spaces are interspersed with material embodiment, and in the interviews, we were able to develop ideas surrounding the ways in which digital spaces are embodied. Occupying this familiar online space together for the purpose of an interview challenges the binaries surrounding online and offline spaces, by engaging with discussions of embodiment within the interview space.

4.5 Reflections on positionality

Within this research, I am positioned as both an insider and outsider. These multiple identities are central to how the research has been conducted methodologically, and shape the construction of narratives throughout the analysis. Throughout the research process, I have relied upon using reflexivity as a tool to navigate the research, make meaning from the positions that I occupy in relation to participants, and unpack the ways in which my own subjectivities impact the production of knowledges. Reflexivity is fundamental to a feminist approach to research as it makes explicit the power that operates within research relationships, and provides a critical reflection on how the position of the researcher constitutes the ways that knowledges are produced (Ramazonoglu and Holland, 2002). Whilst I have offered reflexive accounts of the research process throughout each section of this chapter so far, I want to further explore some reflections on positionality here.

I have a lot of things in common with most of my participants. I am a woman, I am white, I am able bodied, I am of a similar age to the majority of participants, and I am involved in feminist networks. All of these identities that I share with my participants make me an insider. Being positioned as an insider has been considered as a privileged position because it allows a certain sense of familiarity between researcher and researched, which means that researchers can represent the voices of participants in a more ethical way (Bridges, 2001). Perry, Thurston, and Green (2004) argue that being an insider is especially beneficial when the researcher discloses her identities to the participants. Furthermore, they suggest that remaining detached from participants is of no real benefit to the research, meaning that we should strive to find meaningful connections and associations within the research relationship. These insider identities that I occupy did not necessarily need to be disclosed within my research, but I did discuss with participants my experiences of our shared identities.

These shared identities, my insider status, did afford a strong rapport with participants, and the shared knowledges that we had allowed us to discuss topics without detailed explanations. This is particularly true when we discussed feminist theory. Many of the women who took part in

my research had studied in higher education, and some had pursued postgraduate degrees. Not only did this mean that we could build rapport easily by sharing experiences of research and experiences of education, but it also meant that we shared an understanding and awareness of theoretical arguments that are drawn upon in my research. For example, when discussing their ideas about how they think about their work with some of the participants, they sometimes mentioned theories or concepts such as Laura Mulvey's (1975) ideas around the female gaze. The shared knowingness we held about these concepts meant that participants did not need to explain them to me, and instead could discuss their interpretations of them and how they mattered to their practices. This shared understanding based on my insider position means that I was able to gather more in depth, richer data. In this way, through this shared context as an insider, I was able to mitigate the worry that I would be misrepresenting the voices of participants within the analysis. Whilst overlooking parts of data due to a taken-for-grantedness is a concern for insider researchers (LaSala, 2003), in my research being an insider meant that I was clear on how my participants understood and analysed their own practices because we discussed them in depth, and from there I was able to analyse using their ideas. In this sense, I know that the ways in which I have analysed their data is representative of what matters to the participants. Whilst this is not a participatory project and participants were not able to contribute to the analysis process, the discussions that we had around theory and concepts relating to their practice enabled me to responsibly represent their voices through the analysis by applying ideas that are already meaningful to their experiences.

However, in some ways I am an outsider to the group of women who participated in my research. I am not a digital feminist artist, so whilst I do share certain characteristics and identities with the women involved, I am an outsider to the group as a whole. I felt it was important to disclose that I am not an artist to participants, so I included this in the information sheet, and some participants asked about my interest in researching their experiences. Some scholars find that an outsider status is beneficial because it means that researchers are interested in things that insiders may overlook because of their familiarity with the group, so are able to ask questions that an insider might not (LaSala 2003; Perry et al, 2004). I found that in being an outsider, I was able to ask naïve questions that perhaps an insider to the group may not have needed to ask. For example, I asked for clarity when participants were discussing particular styles or techniques that they liked to use in their work, or when they used terminology that I was unfamiliar with. Being an outsider in this way allowed greater clarity and in turn generated richer data because it included rich descriptions and explanations, but also worked to challenge

the power within the research relationship. My asking naïve questions placed participants as expert knowers, which made for a more equal balance of power.

I want to be careful of recreating a binary here between insider and outsider positions as this is an over simplification of how we experience identities as researchers and as people (Hellawell, 2006; Hayfield and Huxley, 2015). Following Sandra Acker's (2000) notion that our multiple subjectivities make us both insiders and outsiders at the same time, allowing us to move between the two positions in a fluid way, I neither consider my position in this research as an insider or outsider (see also Gair 2012). Similarly to Hayfield and Huxley (2015), I experienced subtle ways in which I was simultaneously an insider and outsider through the intersection of my identities. For example, my identity as a lesbian meant that I was an outsider to my heterosexual participants, but I was also still an insider in that I am a white woman. In the same way, with my queer participants I was an insider based around sexuality, so we shared a different way of understanding but I remained an outsider as not being a digital feminist artist like them. These subtleties allowed me to be empathetic whilst also remaining critical enough to ask questions. By drawing on different commonalities and familiarities with different participants, I recognised that just as my own identity is never fixed, theirs were the same. Noticing my own changing position allowed me to conceptualise their multiple standpoints, and this ensured that I was careful in not representing my participants as a homogenous group. As such, reflecting on my positionality reaffirms my commitment to the epistemic position that I take within the research in that I recognise myself and my participants as occupying intersecting and fragmented shifting identities, and this shapes the knowledges that we construct throughout the research.

Reflecting on my insider and outsider positions here has been helpful in understanding that neither an insider or outsider position provides epistemic privilege within feminist research. Although there were clear advantages of being seen as both an insider or outsider, for my research it was the recognition that this binary is too simplistic that was the greatest advantage. Allowing myself the fluidity of moving between familiarity and difference with each participant gave me a much better understanding of the intersecting positions that they occupy, because they were made so explicit in our interviews. This challenge to binary thinking about researcher positionality serves to also break down the boundaries which structure power within the research relationship.

4.6 Feminist research ethics

My research was granted ethical approval from York St John University Research ethics board. Within an ethical framework based on the British Sociological Association's ethical guidelines (2017), I paid attention to confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent to ensure that I protected participants from any harms. Within this, feminist research is often fraught with ethical dilemmas and challenges because it strives to challenge exploitation in research and use social research to contribute to empowerment for women (Fonow and Cook, 2005). Moreover, Guimaraes (2007) argues that ethics is at the heart of what makes feminist research *feminist*, suggesting that integrity and responsibility should be at the forefront of a feminist approach to ethical research. In this section I will detail the ethical considerations that I worked with through this research, further highlighting the importance of ethics in feminist research.

To ensure I obtained informed consent in this research, I initially used a formal information sheet and participant consent form. The information sheet was sent via email when potential participants expressed interest in participating, and it included what the research was about, what would be expected of participants, how their data would be managed, and where the outcomes of the research could be published in the future. Following this, I exchanged emails with participants to discuss any questions that they had and when they were satisfied, they were asked to electronically sign an informed consent form. Whilst this meets the satisfaction of an ethics board, I was conscious that obtaining meaningful consent, especially for a feminist project, needed further consideration. Miller and Bell (2012) argue that consent is not simply an exchange at the beginning of the research, and instead it should be an ongoing renegotiation throughout the research process between researcher and participants. Because feminist research often is reflexive and can change throughout the process, as is the case with my research here, obtaining consent only before the research commences is not enough. Participants have only consented to what we think the research will be at the start, and so consent needs to be an ongoing process within a feminist process. In my research, consent was negotiated verbally and in writing throughout the research.

The day before interviews were scheduled to take place, I contacted the participants to ask if they were still happy to take part, and at the beginning of the interview we discussed again what the interview was for, and where any information might be published in the future. At the end of the interviews, we again discussed their feelings around how the interview went, and how they felt about what we had spoken about. This ongoing approach to consent allowed participants multiple opportunities to understand and negotiate boundaries surrounding data.

The information sheet and these ongoing conversations around consent also included information about their right to withdraw consent, and I allowed adequate time after the interviews were complete for participants to review their transcripts and withdraw any of their data.

Whilst none of the participants wanted to withdraw their interview responses, some were concerned with anonymity. Whilst artists are not necessarily understood as a vulnerable population, there were some concerns around their safety that I had to pay close attention to. Some of the women involved expressed how they lived in politically conservative countries or cities, and that they often felt unsafe when exhibiting any work that could be deemed as provocative because of the politics of where they lived. In one case, one of the participants explained how she had relocated to a different country to ensure her safety because of the negativity she experienced. Anonymity therefore was a central concern to ensure all participants are protected from potential harms if they were identified through the research. All of the transcripts were anonymised carefully, participants were given pseudonyms which they chose themselves, and any additional identifying information such as where they lived was obscured so that they could not be identified. Moreover, all recordings and transcripts were stored physically in a locked cabinet in a locked office on campus, and digital copies were stored on a password protected device and on a secure university server. Furthering a commitment to confidentiality, all transcripts were audio recorded and transcribed only by myself, and I did not share transcripts with anyone outside of the supervisory team. This arrangement was made clear to participants in the information sheet and was discussed prior and after the interviews took place.

Another ethical consideration central to my approach was thinking about the relationship between researcher and researched. Whilst feminist research strives to generate a more equal balance of power within research relationships with a reflexive approach where the researcher is more open with participants, there exists a worry of reproducing ethical issues (Kirsch, 2005). In my research, I was conscious of the dangers inherent to blurring the boundaries surrounding a research relationship, and took certain measures to mitigate the risks associated with this. Firstly, I openly introduced discussions of boundaries prior to the interviews to try to manage any sense of disappointment or exploitation that participants might have felt. Kirsch (2005) advocates that researchers set clear boundaries with participants to ensure that both participants and the researcher are free from feelings of disappointment, and so that neither parties compromise confidentiality. Whilst Kirsch's concerns mainly centre on ethnographic

work where researchers spend a long time with participants thus form closer bonds than in an interview setting, I was struck by how easy it was to feel as though my participants were my friends. Because of my commitment to challenging power dynamics in interviews through the use of unstructured interviewing, I built rapport with participants which often felt like the beginning of a friendship. I was asked by a number of participants to meet for coffee beyond the interview setting, and one woman invited me to her home to visit. It was in these moments where boundaries had to be reassessed and renegotiated. I found myself reminding participants that this relationship was a research relationship, and we discussed the ethics of forming friendships beyond the research.

This being said, I question if the parameters we set actually did cause harm. Similarly to Huisman (2008), I felt as though I had let my participants down by not being able to continue a friendship with them. I worried that they felt exploited, as if I was simply there to extract data from them. I also feared that by letting these women down I was counteracting my commitment to empowering the lives of women because I was reinforcing a power dynamic. Sampson, Bloor, and Fincham (2008) explore how it is difficult for feminist researchers who often come into harm in the form of emotional obstacles especially when leaving the field and moving onto a new part of the research process. This is true for my experience also, because of the reflexive approach it was difficult to reconcile these feelings and also move onto analysis. Therefore, similarly to Stacey (1988), the ethical challenges that I faced in the research remain somewhat unresolved emotionally, meaning that feminist research approaches can in some ways be harmful for the researcher. However, I remain comfortable with the ethical approach of setting clear boundaries, but I do share Cotterill's (1992) view that a greater sharing of how researchers manage the emotional demands of research would be beneficial to feminist methodology literature.

4.7 Analysing data

For this research, I used inductive thematic analysis to analyse the data and worked from a constructionist theoretical perspective, meaning that realities are constructed through interpreting the words of participants, rather than understanding social realities as discoverable through research (Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2015). Within this, meaning is socially produced and reproduced, so my analysis is interested in theorising both the structural conditions and the sociocultural contexts that participants are embedded within (Burr, 1995). Thematic analysis is therefore an appropriate choice for this particular research because it is akin to feminist principles of reflexivity and flexibility, allowing meaning to be constructed from the

perspective of participants. This works to complement the ontology and epistemology of this research that I discussed earlier in the chapter. In this section, I will outline the steps taken throughout the inductive theoretical analysis that I used in this research, drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) comprehensive six step approach to thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the first phase in thematic analysis is to get to know the data, and familiarise yourself with the data. As they suggest, because I had conducted the interviews, I already arrived at the analysis with some prior knowledge of the data and with that, some early ideas pertaining to coding. Being immersed in the data is essential to thematic analysis, so the first phase was an ongoing and overlapping one for my research. I began to immerse myself through the transcription process. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants, and I transcribed each interview myself. As a feminist researcher, it felt important to transcribe all of the interviews myself, and also to make sure to transcribe as accurately as possible. This included producing descriptions of the tone of voice being used, noting the types of pauses and silences that happened, recording laughter and any other expressions, and using the exact words that participants used themselves. Riessman (1993) and Bird (2005) both highlight how important the transcription process is in the first phase of familiarising yourself with the data. They each outline, along with Braun and Clarke (2006), how transcribing becomes an interpretive act whereby the researcher is active in meaning making from the outset. For my research, I found transcribing to be extremely helpful in familiarising myself with the data. I used this time to really listen to what my participants had said, and this allowed a better reflection on the interviews themselves, allowing me to see patterns between transcripts. When the transcription was finished, I spent one month immersing myself in the data. This involved reading and re-reading each transcript in multiple locations and at different times of the day, to understand how I was interpreting the words of participants. During this time, I also kept notes to track my thinking surrounding patterns or trends that I was observing in the data. These notes, which existed in the form of scribbles in the margins, post-it notes, lists, and my research diary formed the basis of the whole analysis, and were especially important in the second phase of the analysis.

Generating initial codes is the second phase of Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide, and searching for themes is the third. For my research, whilst these were two different phases, I worked reflexively and found that there were strong patterns within the data which could become clear themes. I chose to manually code the data, and so did not use any software to assist with generating initial codes. Practically, I worked systematically through each transcript, using

highlighting pens to colour code and then copying phrases and quotes and moving them around into different documents in order to construct meaningful broader themes. Throughout this, I was careful of not losing the context of quotes, so made sure to copy the words surrounding the quote and not just abstract phrases (Bryman, 2012). I used the words and language of the participants to code the data to ensure that the analysis remained grounded within the data rather than fitting into themes or theories which already existed. This phase of initial coding helped to organise the data into similar groups, and whilst these groups were overlapping and messy, they allowed me to begin constructing broader themes. From the coding process, I was able to place data into three categories which would be developed to become the units of analysis. These are social media, specifically Instagram, the body and embodiment, and space.

Phase four, which involves reviewing themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), was also an overlapping phase with phases two and three. After identifying potential themes, I spent time reviewing the codes and sub-themes. This included making sure that there were enough data for each theme and sub-theme, and that data within each theme had a meaningful relationship to each other and made a coherent narrative. After reviewing both the thematic map that I had created with the sub themes and codes and reviewing the transcripts again to ensure that the final themes accurately represented the context of the interviews, I was confident in the final themes. This led to phase five which is concerned with defining and naming themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This included considering the meaning of each theme in relation to the overall narrative of the research, and also defining the significance of any sub-themes. I worked to produce descriptions of each theme and sub-theme, to further map out the connections between each theme and where and how the sub-themes might fit into the final analysis. The naming of the themes and sub themes was an ongoing process which involved working reflexively to ensure each theme accurately represented the essence of the interviews as a whole.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach taken in my research, and has explored my reflections on the process throughout. I began this chapter by stating the aims of the research, which were constructed in conversation with both literature and with the women who took part in the research. These aims serve to structure the ways in which the methodology was designed and carried out. I have also worked to define digital feminist artists, in this chapter, and I argue that this group should be considered a specific hidden population. This argument is one of the main contributions to methodological literature as it demonstrates the nuances of

intersecting identities which limit the visibility of digital feminist artists. Following this, I discussed sampling, detailing the purposive sampling method that I used to gather a sample of sixteen digital feminist artists. My discussion of the interview process describes the usefulness of unstructured interviews and advocates for the value of online interviewing as a specifically feminist practice particularly when researching experiences of digital spaces and cultures. I also explain how I used thematic analysis in my research, drawing from Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step approach. Reflections on positionality and research ethics are also documented in this chapter, and I make a conscious effort to engage with my research diary throughout the chapter, to ensure that reflexivity is carefully practiced in my research to ensure that feminist research principles remain central.

A feminist, qualitative approach to methods and methodology was crucial for this research, as it furthers the resistive approach that I embody as a researcher and best represents the ontological and epistemological position of the research. Through an engagement with feminist epistemologies in the previous chapter, I have designed a methodological path which seeks to challenge the ways in which knowledge about women is produced, and sought to conduct ethical, reflexive research which places participants at the centre of knowledge production, and as specific knowers. In addition, my use of unstructured online interviews works to confront and reassess the balance of power within research relationships, and this paired with my reflections on this process contribute to the notion that knowledges are always situated and partial ways of knowing.

The following chapter is the first of three analysis chapters which explore the main themes constructed through the analysis of data as detailed here in this methodology chapter. The first, chapter five, focuses on Instagram. I argue there that Instagram can be understood as a site of feminist resistance for digital feminist artists.

Chapter 5: Practicing feminist resistance on Instagram

5.1 Introduction

Instagram has become a popular social media platform since its launch in 2010, outgrowing Facebook in popularity (Longobardi, 2020; Prawitasari, 2020; Marengo, 2018). Unlike other popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, Instagram prioritises visual imagery over text, allowing users to upload images and videos with small captions to their feed. Being the most widely used photo sharing app to date (Landsverk, 2014), Instagram allows

users to communicate with others through both the sharing of images as well as providing likes and comments on images that other users share. The pairing of mobile devices and social media platforms like Instagram mean that the everyday lives of individuals are communicated in new contexts of connection and social visibility (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013; Zappavigna, 2016). With 'likes' being the primary form of interaction and communication between Instagram users, Instagram feeds the visual marketplace at a significantly greater rate than other social network services (Schmeichel, Kerr & Linder, 2020). Such a heightened focus on images leads to the need to understand how identities and bodies are constructed and understood in digital space (Skeggs, 2001). This is because Instagram provides a new space and new ways to exchange value through technology which becomes marked upon material bodies (Ringrose, 2013). Whilst Ringrose points to the ways in which images are traded as currency in terms of social and bodily capital, Instagram is also more directly related to the marketplace.

No longer considered an app for personal communication only, the platform is used by businesses for promoting products and services through advertising (Prawitasari, 2020). As such, Instagram sits within a framework of production and consumption whereby individuals who use Instagram actively engage in a consumer marketplace (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Further, by celebrating individualism, self-branding, and empowerment, Instagram constructs a meshing of producer and consumer which is emblematic of neoliberal capitalism (Crepax, 2020; Duffy & Hund, 2015). This meshing points to an erosion of boundaries between spheres within postmodern culture, and Crepax (2020) outlines how everything thus becomes political and aesthetic. As aesthetics increasingly mould consumption practices, Instagram's visual based technology has direct implications for art worlds as well as for feminism.

Instagram is integral to the practice of digital feminist artists in this sample. All of the women involved in this project used Instagram and spoke about the importance of using Instagram for their success as artists, a measure which varied amongst the sample. Being a successful artist was, for some, making enough money to live solely through the production of their artwork. For many, success was measured in the scope of their Instagram following, the size of their audience. For others, their understanding of their success was attributed to how they connected with their audiences, the types of messages their Instagram feed was disseminating, and how these messages on this platform held the possibility for change. It is this mix of politically fuelled artistic practice and a wide-reaching digital platform based on the visual which offers the hope for social change for digital feminist artists. Therefore, within this project, the use of Instagram is understood as an act of resistance by feminist digital artists. In this sense,

Instagram is argued to offer an alternative way of knowing about art, and acts as a space of feminist resistance though making women's work visible, deinstitutionalising art worlds, and troubling the binaries inherit to art as an institution. However, to claim that using Instagram is purely an act of resistance is an oversimplification of the experiences of the women involved. Drawing from these experiences, I will also argue that these acts of resistance are regulated in multiple ways by Instagram itself as well as regular internet users. Such regulations, although existing outside of traditional art institutions, place similar self-censorship and restrictions on creative practices for women artists, thus the following discussions are framed around the tensions between traditional and digital art spaces and how this sample of digital feminist artists navigate their practice.

In this chapter, I will be drawing on the interviews conducted as part of my research. As defined in the methodology chapter, participants involved in this research are self-identified women who make feminist digital art, meaning that they create work using digital methods and exhibit their work in online locations. As such, the terms 'digital feminist artist' and 'digital feminist art' will be employed throughout the following chapters to describe the women and their work. Following ethical guidelines, also discussed within the methodology chapter, all of the women involved have been given a pseudonym and any other identifying characteristics or factors have been obscured in order to protect their identities.

5.2 Resistance and Instagram

5.2.1 Making digital feminist art visible

The concept of art is made up of a series of binaries which structure what is and what is not classed as art. As discussed previously in the literature review, art has been taken to mean sets of objects which contain an artistic essence, so much so that some objects are regarded artistic and others as not (Inglis, 2005). Although this is a common sense understanding, a sociological understanding of art argues that no objects have intrinsic qualities that make it artistic, instead the label of art, artwork, or artist is awarded by social groups whose interests are amplified by the objects being labelled as such (Becker, 1984; Inglis, 2005). As such, art is always part of the social world and is never neutral. Always bound up in politics, in the sense that art functions as a site of tension and struggle between social groups, some social groups have much to gain from certain object being considered art or by other objects being denied the same description (Wolff, 1981). As a modern, western concept (Inglis, 2005), art has come to be known by what are its opposites meaning that the ways in which we know about art and about artists are bound

to binaries which work to structure social relations; especially gender (Howson, 2005). Further, feminist artists and art historians have criticised modernist principles, critiquing the notion that art is separate from power, politics, and society, and instead preferring a postmodern approach which purposefully challenges hierarchies inherent to traditional art worlds (Millner, Moore & Cole, 2015). This sociological and feminist understanding of art is especially important to this project as it points to an epistemological basis of art which is prefaced by a standpoint of privilege, allowing the weaving of the narratives and everyday experiences of the women involved in the project with the binaries which structure their experiences in gendered ways.

One important binary within the institution of art is characterised by its separation of producers and evaluators of artwork, whereby art needs to be bought as part of a capitalistic economy in order to validate its very status as artwork. The close ties with art and capitalism, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, mean that the values which shape capitalism also play a part in shaping an understanding of the value of art (Kompatsiaris, 2019). For example, Wallach (1984) suggests that the common place characterisations of capitalism are individualisation and history as the story of great men, and that this is synonymous with how art criticism classifies valuable art (see also Foster, 1983; Wolff, 1983; Inglis & Hughson, 2005). Monetary value placed on art that captures values of capitalism maintains a border between producer and evaluator. As such, this framework which upholds the separation of art and appreciator is founded in an epistemology based on the standpoint of privilege. The women involved in this project understood this concept of an art world to exclude them on the basis of their varying levels of such privilege. For example, Sadie characterised her experience of art worlds through the lens of institutional inequality:

> I think that the art world is very much a classist place and I think that the way galleries operate, a lot of the galleries cater to rich buyers and collectors, you know, who treat art as an investment and I remember being a very very emerging artist myself and just trying so hard to get my work into galleries, and it's a really snobby environment

Whilst this understanding is reminiscent of how art plays a role in the acquisition and maintenance of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) in order to preserve a hierarchal social order organised by class relations (DiMaggio, 1987), participants also spoke to how gender is organised through art by making women's work invisible. From her standpoint, Sadie's position as an outsider to traditional art worlds means that she is denied access. As previously noted in the literature review, because art critics, collectors, and gallerists determine what type

of work is deemed legitimate art, art as an institution is guided by an elite and homogenous group who refer to each other in order to shape the meanings of art in the interest of the elite (Sparague-Jones, 2011; Pollock, 2003; Parker & Pollock, 2013). The political workings of how art is understood contribute to how women who make work can access and participate in such worlds because the fragmented and marginal standpoints from which women stand, including the women involved in this project, do not fit into dominant institutional epistemology. Elite art worlds produce and reaffirm the boundaries of art, artists, and art spaces based on the epistemology of dominance, namely white, middle class men (Sparague-Jones, 2011). All of the women in this project, including those who regularly sold their work professionally, did not consider themselves to be part of the dominant art world because their position as women, or queer women, is consistently at the margin of a structure which distinguishes and reproduces barriers to both participation in traditional art worlds and also social life.

Using Instagram can primarily be framed as an act of resistance through the ability of it to be used as an online gallery for my sample of digital feminist artists. Through having the ability to curate their own portfolios and galleries using an Instagram feed, the women in this project made their artistic labour visible, foregrounding the materiality of their bodies, the work that they do, into digital art space. This automatically challenges the notion that art is an expression of masculine genius whilst also placing women's labour at the centre of art spaces, something which is consistently ignored and hidden (Nochlin, 1988). Practicing as a professional, paid artist was something that the women in this project struggled with for reasons including family responsibilities and living costs. Tessa, a participant in this project, pointed out how she "can't make a living fully at the moment from what I do so I also have a normal job", similar to Nicola who works "managing a gallery mainly so I can afford to do my other work". Their words serve as a reminder that art is work which rests on an institution that makes this labour invisible for the purpose of reproducing oppressive binaries.

This veiling of women's artistic labour can be understood through looking to feminist art history, which outlines the binaries inherent to women's artistic work. As discussed previously in the literature review, women's artistic work historically is tied to the private sphere, where any creative work that women engage in is considered a hobby rather than an occupation (Pollcok, 2003; Cottingham, 2000). This stems from a heteropatriarchal view of women's place within the waged labour markets, whereby when the private sphere of the home is fully financed by a husband, women's art is not taken seriously because it does not need to contribute to a capitalist economy. Instead, her social location as a woman ensures that she falls into the

stereotype of a lady painter (Nochlin, 1998). This stereotype is based on patriarchal binaries which construct women on the basis of the assumed naturalness of their femininity and their bodies. As such, women have struggled to be visible as professional artists because their position as women means that they have not been considered individualist, labourers, or genius (see Bain 2004). This position is distinct from men's artistic labour which is always waged, and always public following the dominant cultural myth that the artist is a male hero (Garfunkel, 1984). The traditional art institution relies on heavily gendered knowledges about what art is and who can be an artist in order to maintain the binaries which structure relations of power between social groups.

Within this project, these gendered ways of knowing about art and artists were influential in constructing identities for the women involved, and these narratives of art were very much an embodied experience. During interviews, some women expressed that they had a complex understanding of their identity as an artist. For example, Christine expressed how

> Even just calling it art, I've always struggled with calling it my work, or my art, I always just thought this is a passion project, this is a hobby… I just grew up shooting home movies with my sister and best friend… I grew up taking photos of women and now I am shooting what I know and what I'm inspired by, which is women

This allows us to understand how the construction of traditional knowledge about art works to exclude women's narratives. Despite having a large online following and being involved in some gallery exhibitions in her hometown, Christine consciously debated her authority to identify herself an artist and to call her work art. Because of the knowledges produced through the binaries of traditional art worlds, her work sits at the margins of what is often deemed legitimate art, and so she struggles to identify with *being* an artist. Kauffman (1995) suggests that women artists are compelled to identify themselves somewhere between the myth of the male artist and the stereotype of the lady painter, understanding that occupying the space of a professional woman artist is at the expense of being committed wives or mothers, or vice versa. This understanding is reminiscent of Garfunkel (1984) who argues that women artists reject both the myth of the male genius as well as rejecting the idea that women lack commitment to art, preferring it as a hobby. However, she argues that without a vocabulary of vocational support for women who practice art, women struggle to interpret their identity as an artist when they are not *doing* art. The struggle to embody the occupational identity as an artist in this project speaks to these narratives of a lack of a repertoire to speak about women's identities as

artists. This embodiment of an outsider to the status of an artist works to naturalise the hierarchies inherent to the art world therefore limiting access to art spaces or art as an occupation for some women. As such, space is a crucial aspect of women's identity as artists as well as being critical in making women's work visible, troubling the binary between the male genius and the lady painter (Bain, 2004).

By using Instagram as a space to exhibit artwork, the women in this project make their work as artists visible, which exposes and resists the binaries which uphold women's marginalisation within art spaces. In this sense, Instagram as a digital platform offers a new space for women to simultaneously resist and reimagine the role of art and the artist. Sadie articulates this point:

> Traditionally art has been sort of a boy's club in many ways, so it's really great that with our access to the internet and our ability to bring our imagery to viewers even through Instagram… it's so good to bring visual artwork to the mass public, and I think that that's a really great way for people, and any minorities, and women, people who don't have access to fancy galleries or buyers, or anything like that, it's a way for them to show off their work and to bypass the classist systems that happen in the art world

Having access to Instagram means that the women involved in this project can constitute themselves as artists and curate their own galleries outside of institutionalised art worlds, with a desire to construct alternative art spaces foregrounded in a feminist standpoint. From this perspective, Instagram offers a space for people who occupy marginalised positions, and who would not be deemed artists due to their gender identity, to make visible their artistic work and in turn be known as artists. As Bain (2005) suggests, to be recognised as an artist involves the successful construction and maintenance of an artist's identity. Instagram allows the women who took part in this project to construct and maintain such an identity by consistently uploading to their Instagram feeds and engaging with other artists to establish community as well as working relationships.

The construction and maintenance of artistic communities is understood as a central component of using Instagram for digital feminist artists in this sample. For example, Jenna commented that "everything now I think exists on Instagram at least as far as the world I know, as much as the young artists I know, it is almost like having a virtual existence", and Nicola explaining how "my Instagram is like my portfolio so I can easily collaborate with people all over the world". The connections with other artists, especially artists who are also women, was considered one of the benefits of using Instagram within this sample of digital feminist artists.

This can be understood as a furthering of the idea that artists who are not involved in institutional and formal art organisations will often work in close proximity to one another, usually clustered around specific local art scenes. These clusters allow for the sharing of technical skills, undertaking group exhibitions, and providing feedback to others (Bain, 2005; Steinfeld, 1981). Although this concept of clustering does apply in some cases especially in larger cities, this does not account for people who work outside of these spaces and excludes them based on location. For these digital feminist artists, who are located in different locations around the world, Instagram offers this sense of clustering. Being part of a larger feminist community whilst living in different locations allows digital feminist artists to contribute to feminist politics which extends beyond their immediate physical location. Instagram presents itself as an undefined space without temporal and physical boundaries. As such, constructing feminist spaces on Instagram bridges the private and public so that the presence of feminist artists in virtual spaces increases participation in feminism in non-virtual spaces (Myzelev, 2015). Whilst the distinctions and tensions between virtual and non-virtual spaces will be discussed more thoroughly in later chapters, the present discussion highlights how Instagram can be understood as a space which has the potential to foster feminist activism by enabling communities to actively engage with feminist politics through the production and consumption of feminist art (Kasra, 2017). Moreover, this means that Instagram allows the labour of digital feminist artists to be made visible on a global scale and so can enhance their identity as artists.

Moreover, the digital nature of Instagram is also important especially to my sample of digital feminist artists because it makes the work visible before it makes the artist visible. This has powerful implications for resisting the heavily gendered myths that perpetuate harmful narratives about women artists. Sadie outlines how:

> I also really enjoy that sort of anonymity with my work when I meet people that I work with in person they actually confess that they didn't know if I was a man or a woman, or, you know, what to expect, so I kind of really like that element as well, I mean looking at my work, to me it's obvious that a woman made it but that's just my interpretation of it, so I think it's nice that, having to work with technology gives you an easy way to connect with people and message people from all over the world who like my artwork, or I like their work, and at the same time they don't really see who I am and my work really just speaks for itself so I think that's an outcome of that

It can be argued that the internet can offer liberation for women (Plant, 1993) and this was particularly useful to early cyberfeminists who argued that within digital space women can be free of the materiality of their bodies and thus their oppression, representing a breakdown of gender boundaries due to the relationship between the internet and gender (Braidotti, 1996). In the case of digital feminist artists, this sentiment is accurate as the women involved in this project could construct their online presence to curate their personal Instagram feeds without revealing their gender. This is a unique offering for women who are artists, as taking away the 'woman' in 'woman artist' removes the stereotypes that are inherent to ways of knowing about art (see Withers, 1976). Instagram can then be considered a platform of resistance because it does not categorise woman as a genre in the way that institutional, formal art worlds do, and as such, allows digital feminist artists in this sample the power to define and categorise their own identity as an artist, and organise their work in ways that do not rest on their gender. As well as this, the ability to connect with other artists contributes to the presence of an online feminist community as previously mentioned. As Sadie points out, working with technology offers an easy way to connect with other artists and this works to further resist the notion that art made by women is a hobby and not considered to be valuable art. Using Instagram allows women artists the authority to discuss their work outside of the demands of traditional art worlds which places 'woman' at the forefront of knowledge about their work. Not only does this resist gender inequality within art worlds, but also fosters ideas of communication and collaboration between producers and consumers of feminist art. In this, the politics of feminist art can be negotiated from the position of women themselves, as opposed to being defined by institutions.

Further, audiences can come to view the work on Instagram without the specific ways of knowing that are intrinsic to the category of women's art. This is something that appealed to some of the women in this sample, especially Katie:

> When it comes to artwork I like that it is a space where you can create your own identity because I think it's kind of fun, there's the way you are perceived in real life because you're bound to your physical body and you can't help but be judged by people even if someone is trying really hard not to make assumptions about you based on your physical body but they still will, because that's the way that our society works, but with online space, you can express yourself and create an idea of yourself based on how you perceive yourself as opposed to how people perceive you when they see you, and I think that's kind of interesting

This is not to say that gender is not important in the work that is produced, the very notion of being a woman is the standpoint from which this sample of digital feminist artists worked and gendered experiences are at the forefront of their work and experience as artists. However, within traditional and formal art spaces, the term 'women's art' was coined in the late twentieth century to pose an alternative to 'the artist'. As previously mentioned, the artist refers to a specific category of knowing which is generally understood as masculine. When 'women's art' is a distinct category from 'art', this implies that art produced by women is not necessarily art in the ways that formal art institutions understand art, but that it is something different (Cherry, 2000). As Jenna clarifies "it would be great if every single piece of print in the world that says woman artist, the word woman could go away and then behind every artist who's male you could put male". This alludes to how this differentiation between women and artist brings with it a new set of criteria to judge and critique the work that women produce. This means that women's art is always read as political because of its association with feminism as a social and political movement. Woman and feminist are two terms which are consistently conflated within art institutions and their work is always evaluated using knowledge of what feminist art is and should be. Therefore, this continues the naturalisation of the binaries within art worlds. Using Instagram can be further understood as a platform of resistance because it challenges this binary because the work is not categorised based on the gender of the artist, so troubles the epistemology inherent to the construction and maintenance of this binary.

5.2.2 Challenging binaries on Instagram

By existing at the margins of traditional art worlds and using Instagram as a platform to exhibit their work, the women involved with this research challenge the very notion of art by troubling the binaries inherent to ways of knowing about art. For example, the binaries between museum and market, high and low culture, and artist and audience, discussed further in the literature review (see Bourdieu, 1984; Proir, 2005; Becker, 2008; Joy et al, 2014; Samborska, 2017), are all challenged by the presence of feminist digital artists exhibiting their work on Instagram. As an online space which is also a social media platform, Instagram challenges the ways in which art can be known because it is displaced from the gallery setting. Although, as also noted in the literature review, galleries themselves have undergone changes in order to widen participation and allow greater access to the institution (Fyfe & McDoanld, 1996) digital feminist artists in this sample move beyond this by shifting the power from institution to producer, meaning they have greater control over their work, and situate their work within spaces governed by a different way of knowing. Although Instagram does offer a different way of knowing about art

for digital feminist artists, and this will be explored further, there does exist tension between what types of works are considered valuable on Instagram, thus problematising the notion that using Instagram gives artists control over their work. This is mainly understood through censorship, which will be addressed and discussed later in this chapter.

The displacement of their work from gallery walls to an Instagram feed can be seen as quite a radical troubling of the binary between high and low culture. Instagram is emblematic of low culture (Murray, 2015). As a visual social media platform, Instagram has been regarded as superficial, shallow, and the images which appear within the site are considered easily replicable (Carr, 2015). Instagram is for the masses, and its popularity awards it the status of part of low culture. By placing their work on Instagram to be exhibited to growing numbers of followers, the women involved in this project trouble the binary which in turn destabilises the institution of art. Being tied so closely to consumption and the marketplace, Instagram is a space where art and consumption meet, and this intersection is experienced by the women involved in this project who used Instagram to exhibit their work and promote themselves as artists, using the space as both museum and marketplace. For example, Beth mentioned how she views her Instagram account as "just as much a marketing channel for me as it is an exhibition space" and Laura outlining how "it's nice to have somewhere to actually place your work and things you are working on and your ideas where it can be seen by people who might be interested in buying or collaborating in some way". Sitting on the boundary of the marketplace and the museum, digital feminist art on Instagram furthers the concept of the m(art) world (Joy et al, 2014) previously discussed in the literature review, by not only merging spaces of consumption with art museums, but also by merging this within everyday cultural experiences of social media. This means that digital feminist art is made visible and accessible within everyday experiences whereas the merging of art and the market is usually bound to luxury brands whereby the presence of art signals a higher cultural value. In the case of this sample of digital feminist artists, the relationship between feminist art the marketplace is not necessarily tied to the notion of high culture because it situates the production of art within online spaces of consumption rather than institutions of high culture.

For the women involved, not only does the placement of their work on Instagram trouble the boundaries between museum and market, but it also challenges the epistemology of art that produces knowledge from the standpoint of privileged elite. One way that this epistemology is challenged is through using Instagram to make feminist art accessible to wide audiences, those who mainly sit outside of the arena of high culture. Sadie details this point:

Instagram is great because it brings art to people who might not be interested in art, I mean, you know, it might be someone who is mostly interested in, whatever, latte art, but because now on Instagram they may be exposed to some interesting photographers or videographers and it sort of broadens your horizon and that can be great

Because of the popularity and accessibility of Instagram, as noted in the introduction to the chapter, there are more opportunities to access and engage with feminist art. This challenges the epistemology of art because it deinstitutionalises the very notion of who art is for. Although it is evident that art galleries and museums have made changes to the ways in which they operate to incorporate widening participation (Fyfe & McDonald, 1996), this still does little to challenge the epistemology of the institution of art. Using Instagram to exhibit artwork means that there is much less of a distinction between producer and evaluator of art. As agreed upon by Becker (2008) and Bourdieu (1984), art needs an institutional framework that makes it possible to distinguish some cultural objects as art and others as non-art; this framework is what we often refer to as art criticism. This knowledge system which regulates our comprehensions of art maintains social boundaries which in turn reproduce social hierarchy. When exhibiting on Instagram, the line between producer and consumer of art is completely blurred. The images that the women in this project posted to their Instagram account are displayed alongside the images that their followers upload, making the virtual gallery wall a space where it is possible to be both producer and consumer.

When the recognised roles of producer and consumer are blurred, there is less space to reproduce hierarchical structures. Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1991) notes how the role of an art critic sits on the boundary between museum and market, making it an inherently political position. When art is taken out of galleries and is exhibited on Instagram instead, the role of the art critic becomes much more democratised as the artwork means something different on Instagram compared to being installed in a gallery space. This means that because the art itself is out of context, the context of how we know and how we understand the images changes too. From the standpoint of the institution of art, the value of an image is made clear using judgements based on conventional boundaries produced from the standpoint of privilege. In this way, the boundaries of what is and is not art, and what is and is not good art are reaffirmed. Exhibiting on Instagram means that these boundaries are blurred, as the judgement of art is not based on such a standpoint of privilege, as the art critic is not such an influential figure within this space, closing the gap between producer and evaluator of art.

The evaluators of art, for feminist digital artists involved in this project, are also producers and consumers. All of the women understood their position on Instagram as both producer and consumer, and they appreciated the knowledge that the evaluators of their work were their followers who are also often both consumers and producers of art as well. For example, Tessa noted how:

> It's nice, you find a lot of other artists that you wouldn't have found otherwise because you can connect with people all over the world, and it's good, you know, to get feedback and give feedback and be exposed to all of this work

For a lot of the other women too, they wanted to engage in the evaluations of their work, they primarily used Instagram in order to communicate with other women who make digital feminist art. Jenna uses Instagram because it "opens it up to conversation and it's really nice getting that feedback", and Katie expressed how she is "not very straightforward in the work so the point is to open up that conversation". Being part of an online community within Instagram, where followers can be both producers and consumers of art challenges the notion that the art critic is the decider on what classifies as art, and what is good art. Because the followers of digital feminist artists in this sample are mainly young women, with Sadie noticing how "my Instagram account tells me that my audience are women aged twenty-five to thirty-five", their evaluations of art come from different standpoints than that of an institutional standpoint and this allows art to be conceptualised outside of the traditional framework of knowing.

This is useful to feminism because it means that the epistemology of art can be reworked to produce knowledge from a feminist standpoint. Echoing the argument from Sprague-Jones (2011), producing knowledge about art from a feminist standpoint would involve working from the interests of women's different political and material positions in the world, acknowledge the workings of power within women's lives, and draw upon discourse which can help women to make sense and give meaning to their experiences in ways that empower them. As such, an understanding of art worlds from a feminist perspective would produce knowledge with women as active participants. This is particularly true of this sample who, through constant engagement with their Instagram followers who evaluate their work, challenge the standpoint of privilege where knowledge about art emerges. This is evident in how Sadie, one of the women involved, spoke about her followers:

> I do think that the artwork I put on Instagram portrayed women in a certain age groups so perhaps those who are in that age group would relate to it more because they see

themselves in the work… it explores themes that people of different backgrounds can relate to and I think that, well definitely my artwork has a lot of queer themes so I would hope that people from a queer background would also relate to the work and use it to empower themselves

The idea of queer themes being represented is something that most of the women involved in this project were interested in. Although this is also a matter of representation, and will be discussed as such in following sections, the commitment to working queer themes into art foregrounds the meshing of art and culture. As previously suggested, Instagram is a central component of social and cultural life and is inherent to the everyday experiences of many different social groups. Engaging with queerness and subcultural identities are a central part of the experiences of the digital feminist artists involved in this project. For example, Jenna discussed how, in her work, she likes "documenting parts of society and culture that might not be the most widely represented, so definitely queer and, you know, that DIY and youth cultures", and Nicola explained that "more of my recent work has been more focused on queer culture and feminism". The main reason for documenting queer and subcultural identities was because their own experiences are foregrounded in these groups. Nicola goes on to discuss one particular piece of her work:

The first piece I made was kind of like a comment on how queer sexuality and sexuality in general… it shows like that whole perspective of being in kind of a like a dominant submissive relationship and comments a bit on age play as well and, you know, in my circles I see people doing this and especially with some friends who have sugar daddies and they are sugar babies… a lot of people around me have queer relationships, and I wanted to portray a feminine perspective around those things and relationships

The notion that art produces culture is inherent to a specific way of knowing about art whereby culture is a tool which further constructs social hierarchies. This is most evident in Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital which explores how having the knowledge and taste are cultural assets which ensure a position of privilege in the social world. From the standpoint of privilege, participation in art enables access to high culture, and this is at the exclusion of other forms of everyday cultural experiences from different and intersectional standpoints. By using Instagram to exhibit their work, digital feminist artists in my sample are re-inscribing public spaces with different ways to understanding identities using their own narratives and experiences (see also Murray, 2015; Vivienne & Burgess, 2013). As such, the digital feminist

artists in this project challenge this very notion that art produces culture by troubling the ways in which culture itself is understood. By foregrounding art in the everyday cultural experiences that they embody from their specific standpoints in the world, they make work which resists dominant ideas about what culture is. Instead, they construct their work from the standpoints of marginalised cultural identities in order to makes sense of their own experiences and construct a digital visual culture etched with feminist politics.

Moreover, representing the communities and identities in which they are situated by embedding their work in a space of everyday cultural experiences such as Instagram, digital feminist artists in this sample further blur the binaries inherent to social hierarchy. Because of the ease of access to Instagram and its visibility within everyday life as previously mentioned, using Instagram as an exhibition space deinstitutionalises the dominant perception of what art is and how we know about artistic practices. This dominant understanding of art is that good art is 'individualised, abstract, and housed in relatively inaccessible places: museums, galleries, and the private homes of the elite' (Sprague-Jones, 2011, 410). Coming from a standpoint of privilege, this type of art world reinforces social divisions within art worlds. When exhibited on Instagram, digital feminist artists position their work in public spaces which can be accessed, closing the gap between who is and who is not allowed access to such spaces.

This section has outlined and explored how digital feminist artists in this sample resist normative art world constructs through their use of Instagram. Within this, it has been established that this sample of digital feminist artists consider Instagram as important to their practice as it allows them a space to exhibit their work outside of traditional art worlds. This is necessary because as demonstrated, traditional art worlds are built from an epistemic position of privilege which devalues and depoliticises feminist art, makes invisible the labour of women's artistic practice, and defines structured binaries which maintain normative social structures. Digital feminist artists in this sample successfully resist dominant ideology of traditional art institutions through using Instagram to exhibit their work. This is because Instagram helps to make their labour visible as artists, resisting the notion that women's involvement in artistic practice is a hobby. This also serves to dispel the myths of both the lady painter and the masculine genius, tropes entrenched in the history of art which perpetuates inequalities between men and women. Another binary which is successfully troubled using Instagram is the distinction between producer and consumer. Being both a producer and consumer of digital art, this sample of digital feminist artists make space for communication and collaboration which fosters a greater political presence in both virtual and non-virtual

spaces. This is because Instagram offers a space for communication and collaboration which enables a shift in power from institution to community. This being said, using Instagram to exhibit feminist digital art is not without tensions. As such, the following section is dedicated to exploring the relationship between resistance and regulation, and evaluating to what extent Instagram can be framed as an art institution which perpetuates patriarchal ideology.

5.3 Regulating resistance on Instagram

Although I have argued that Instagram can be useful for my sample of digital feminist artists as a site of feminist resistance, there are limitations to the scope of such resistive practices which are set out by Instagram itself. As such, the following discussion serves as a necessary criticism of Instagram and its use for digital feminist artists. This includes detailing how the platform places regulations and restrictions on the type of images that can be viewed, how algorithms make visibility difficult for women artists, and how negative interactions with Instagram users can be detrimental to the women involved. More broadly, this critique frames Instagram as a new institution for digital feminist artists which perpetuates patriarchal ideologies inherent to traditional art worlds. As with the previous section, what follows is an analysis of the interviews conducted as part of this project. These interviews have been detailed more thoroughly in the methodology chapter.

5.3.1 Censorship

The censorship of women's narratives, experiences, and bodies has been regarded as an historic feminist issue with its roots in second wave feminist movements (Dawson, 1995). Defined by its association to morality, censorship is often understood in the context of representation, of what we can and cannot be exposed to (Jones, 2006). Moreover, from a feminist perspective, censorship works to structure and maintain patriarchal social order by constructing and reinforcing binaries which position women's experiences as unacceptable. Within this project, censorship is understood to be a questioning of boundaries of morality, tied to feminist movements both historical and contemporary through its association with reassessing the boundaries between public and private spheres. The representational issues which censorship present for this particular sample is beyond the scope of discussion within this chapter but will be engaged with more thoroughly in chapter six. Within the present chapter, the focus is primarily concerned with how Instagram as a platform regulates this sample of digital feminist artists through its algorithms and censorship, and the effects this has on their practice. From here I argue that Instagram replicates art institutions through its censoring practices, which

further marginalises feminist art from art worlds. In doing this, Instagram reproduces binaries which exclude women's experiences and thus reproduces patriarchal ideology. This being said, this section also explores how the digital feminist artists involved in this project navigate censorship which ultimately furthers the resistive elements of their using Instagram to exhibit their work. In this sense, the women involved in this project construct unexpected power from repression (Kotz, 1994).

As noted previously, Instagram offers users the ability to share images with followers and to provide likes and comments to images that other users post to their accounts (Landsverk, 2014). The social media platform sets out community guidelines which outlay the rules on what types of images are deemed appropriate for the platform and uploads deemed inappropriate are removed from the site. As per these guidelines, many of the women involved in this project recalled their experiences of having their uploaded images of their work censored, reported, or taken down by Instagram's algorithmic censorship for violating Instagram guidelines. Through its value-laden and contradictory language (Olszanowski, 2014), Instagram's policies are largely based around nudity which serves to discipline behaviour (Hestres, 2013). As artists focused mainly on representing women's bodies, sexualities, and gendered experiences, the women involved in this project often portray naked bodies in their work, meaning that they are often subject to censorship. For example, Beth discussed how:

> I share a lot of things on the representation of the body and how I think about it. A lot of the times I do get positive reactions of people and with the nude body for example, they feel that it's strange that we don't show that, or can't show that, or in many senses there is a fear with nudity so, yeah, there is that paradox in Instagram that you can post a drawing of a naked body but not a photo. A lot of my photographs are taken down or reported

Whilst primarily an issue pertaining to representation, which will be discussed further in following chapters, Beth's experiences are also exemplary of how Instagram is able to naturalise hegemonic social order through its algorithms and censorship by reproducing traditional art world values based on an epistemology of privilege. Beth notes that posting an image of a drawing of a naked body is deemed acceptable whereas a photograph of a naked body is considered unacceptable. This echoes the sentiment of critics of traditional art institutions who expose how feminist art which focuses on the body has been censored by institutions from art education to art museums (Schneemann, 2002), whereas portrayals of

women's bodies by men are consistent features in art museums and galleries (Nochlin, 1988). More specifically, women's self-photography or performance work that explores sexuality as its subject matter is routinely censored because it threatens a patriarchal social order (Schmeichel, 2020). With the birth of feminist art situated within the women's movement, many feminist artists at the time faced challenges in presenting their work to audiences and were met by walls of indifference from within the art world (Jacobsen, 1991). The traditional art world made it difficult and risky for feminist artists to work with nudity as a subjective experience, meaning that their work as well as the artists themselves were consistently censored. This is because their work posed a threat to the art world as an institution which maintains a patriarchal social order. When women artists work with the body as a subjective experience from a woman's perspective, the ways we know about art are placed under threat (Michna, 2020).

These masculine ways of knowing, as previously discussed in the literature review, define art by its association to formal high culture. As such, technique and objectivity become the marker of art as taught by art education institutions. Drawing, painting, and sculpture are the benchmark of elite art worlds as these techniques represent the epistemic standpoint of traditional art institutions. As argued by Carol Jacobsen (1991: 44) art students who undergo formal training are 'manipulated into embracing a stock of sanctioned media, forms, and ideas befitting the high-art ideologies that dictate whose expression may represent "universal" human experience'. Subjective, embodied experiences such as gender or race are therefore excluded from narratives of art in favour of assumed universal experiences, namely those of white middle class men. In thinking back to Beth's experiences of her photographs being censored but not drawings of naked bodies, it can be understood how Instagram works to delegitimize digital feminist art in the same ways that traditional art institutions have historically devalued feminist artists, by judging it against standards of high art ideology. Therefore, although Instagram offers a platform for digital feminist artists to exhibit their work in order to resist patriarchal ideologies surrounding the body, the ways that their work is censored mainly serves to restrict the content that they can share because the self-referential subjective experiences they represent do not adhere to institutional art world epistemology.

Censorship is achieved on Instagram using the same methods of censorship as traditional art institutions, removing the work from visible platforms, which stems from the same epistemic position as institutional art worlds. These parallels are made clearer with Beth's experiences of physical exhibitions:

Even like recently I'm doing a little show here in the neighbourhood like next week and there's one of this other artists she's painting women's bodies and she noticed my nude photographs and it's not very comparable because she's painting and I am photographing and a photograph is different to a painting I see that, but still I couldn't show the genitals in my pictures but she has, she has paintings of women with just showing the vagina

As such, in the same ways that physical art spaces censor both feminist art and feminist artists, Instagram becomes an institution itself. Thus, Instagram censorship works to devalue feminist art based on the epistemic position of the elite art world, and this ultimately regulates the extent to which digital feminist artists can practice resistance through their work on Instagram. Furthermore, Instagram censorship has a consequential role in the way that feminist art can be known in digital contexts.

Not only does Instagram censor the images, but with this it also censors feminist subjectivities. The censoring of feminist art means censoring both the images themselves, as well as the senses that surround the image. This is what feminist media theorist Olszanowski (2014) names sensorship. By this, she refers to the ways in which censoring an image removes not only the content as an object which violates guidelines, but also removes the experience of the senses surrounding the image for both producer and consumer. Using this term, it is evident that the censorship policies employed by Instagram move beyond simply removing content that may be harmful to a culturally diverse platform, in order to maintain a social order based on a specific type of epistemic position. This being a position of masculine objectivity. As such, when digital feminist artists in this sample use Instagram to exhibit their work, they are embedding embodiment and subjectivity into digital space. Some of the digital feminist artists interviewed consciously worked with themes relating to their subjective experiences of sexuality, usually using their own bodies as both object and subject. Jess recalls some of her experiences:

I did one series that I was nude in, and I definitely was referencing some sexuality and it was just taking control of it, and I think it was quiet and it was personal and, yeah, I would describe it as quiet… and in one of my newer series I'm photographing myself holding my stomach and I had just had an abortion

This insertion of subjectivity, of women's experiences of their bodies from their own perspectives, challenges a patriarchal society that maintains itself on a distinction between who

can look and who can be looked at, which is the benchmark for the appropriate/inappropriate dichotomy (Olszanowski, 2014). When women use self-imagery within their art, they neutralise the power in their bodies being looked at and represented. For Jess, her self-photography is a personal subversion of that power relationship. Feminist art, especially when using self-imagery, has been consistently delegitimised throughout history as discussed throughout this chapter, and Instagram's sensoring continues this work which legitimises a hegemonic social order whilst also maintaining the perspective of what type of art is valuable.

Censoring feminist art, which places subjectivity as a fundamental starting point, means that a public and private divide can be maintained by managing the representations of women in digital space. Women's bodies, and their sexualities, have been considered to exist within the private realm and the maintenance of this divide rests upon the management of women's bodies in public spaces (Rosewarne, 2005, 2007). The proliferation of sexist imagery that exists within public spaces means that women's bodies and sexualities are negotiated and defined and managed through images in advertising. With Instagram being a public platform, sensorship acts as way to continue the management of women's bodies and sexualities within virtual as well as non-virtual spaces. Removing images that digital feminist artists create works to remove the subjectivity of their experience from public space in order to maintain patriarchal binaries. This being said, Jess's commitment to uploading her self-photography to Instagram brings about tension within these binaries. As the cycle of uploading and censoring persists, Jess consistently reinserts her subjectivity into digital space, and carves out a space for her experiences, in a place that actively tries to remove them. As such, digital feminist artists involved in this research create space for their bodies across digital media (see Farman, 2012), showcasing the unexpected power in regulation (Kotz, 1994).

This demonstrates a more complex relationship between feminist art and online spaces than censorship policies outline. As Katherine Jones (2006) states, technology does not just mediate subjectivities, but it actively produces them. Digital feminist artists within this sample and beyond employ an array of techniques to circumvent censorship. One way to negotiate such censorship is through self-censoring their own images, and this is something that Jenna routinely performed:

> For a while you try and kind of fight it the usual way and report back, you know, but after a while you end up just putting this little fuzzy bar over a nipple because it belongs to a woman so it won't be taken down

Although a measure in which Jenna found to be an annoying necessity for her work to stay on her Instagram account, her actions can be understood as a furthering of her resistive practice, and a further challenging of social order. Layering or adding images to a naked body is a deliberate way of sensoring the image. The censoring then becomes part of the image itself. In her correspondence with feminist artists, Olszanowski (2014) found that adding shapes, like bars or flowers, over the body parts which would lead to the removal of the image from Instagram added to the aesthetic of the images as well as negotiated censorship policies. She goes on to argue that the women involved in these practices use Instagram's policies on nudity to become part of their work which not only subverts the epistemology of sensorship, but also reinserts subjectivity into Instagram. As such, although self-censorship has a complex relationship with feminism and representation, which will be discussed in following chapters, the use of self-censorship techniques within virtual spaces communicates an acknowledgement and understanding of policies regarding nudity whilst simultaneously using the policies to build a specific feminist aesthetic. This purposefully takes the tools of patriarchal epistemology and subverts them, using them to construct a feminist aesthetic. This fine line between compliance and resistance acts as a powerful signal of feminist politics which reaches beyond art into contemporary feminist politics and activism more broadly. For example, women use self-objectification to deconstruct narratives of sexualisation in the #freethenipple movement (Matich, 2018; see also Looft, 2017; Keller, 2012). Therefore, whilst Instagram's censorship policies attempt to regulate women's narratives of their bodies, the way that digital feminist artists in this sample respond to censorship actually contributes to the growth of feminist movements.

Another tactic that some of the women in this sample spoke about in order to manage and negotiate censorship was reconfigure the bodies in their work to avoid being removed. For example, Jess explains:

> A lot of my portraits are not facing the camera so you're not sure what you're looking at, it's nude but there's no nudity, you know, so it changes the body and that's directly linked to trying to reflect with who I am and not yet coming to terms with that

More specifically, Nikki uses:

> Techniques such as framing, cropping, layering, contouring and outlines, I don't know, to create sometimes more abstract compositions and sometimes very structured spaces, and although the forms are like somewhat exaggerated in certain areas sometimes the

bodies are not exactly like the body, like the proportions are not specific so they are sometimes somewhat obscure

The ways that these digital feminist artists use digital techniques as tactics to navigate censorship contribute to the construction of their subjectivities. By restructuring and reconfiguring bodies as we understand them, these digital feminist artists create new bodies which exist outside of the binaries on which censorship policies are built. Therefore, by layering and reimagining women's subjectivities, digital feminist artists in my sample take up space on Instagram, and maintain their visibility by using the binaries which exclude them to navigate and construct their work. As Olszanowski (2014, 93) asserts 'recognising the polysemic ontology of censorship while at the same time "playing" with it is one way to destabilise its repressive power'. As such, digital feminist artists can use censorship as a means of destabilising hegemonic social order whilst simultaneously constructing new subjectivities using digital techniques to challenge conceptions of the body.

However, despite actively constructing subjectivity through the images that they post to Instagram, digital feminist artists remain situated within a hegemonic online culture. By manipulating their work to resist binaries which structure censorship, some of the digital feminist artists in this sample faced further challenges. For example, Nikki explains that:

The past couple of years since I started my programme I'd actually lost a fair bit of following and I think that's because I started changing up my images, I started to think about female sexuality and you know the representation and the depiction in a different way and I think that I lost a lot of followers because a lot of people that were viewing my work were maybe men who thought, you know, this is boring and they were here for the risky stuff where I wasn't changing the forms of the bodies

Losing her followers meant that Nikki had lost a lot of her audience and therefore her visibility as an artist as well as a feminist. Although her work focuses on ways to resist normative and sexist representations of women's bodies, and she achieves this by navigating censorship, perhaps the architecture and structure of Instagram allows patriarchal dominance to extend into feminist digital spaces by perpetuating and maintaining boundaries (Herrera, 2017). Like how Instagram replicates the art institution, Instagram may also replicate the cityscape. Rosenware (2005) understands how sexist images used in advertising are placed within cities to masculinise space, this contributes to a global boy's club whereby the public domain is a space of masculine consumption which sees women and their bodies as the commodity. Digital

feminist artists on Instagram challenge the dichotomy between subject and object by being both producer and consumer of their images and subjectivity. To legitimise the gendered roles of producer and consumer, male Instagram users remove the threat that digital feminist artists pose by unfollowing their accounts and as such, diminishing their visibility. The bodies that digital feminist artists in this sample represent in response to sensorship can be considered unruly bodies, as they defy normative feminine values attached to female bodies. By not presenting bodies which reaffirm the gendered experience of looking and being looked at, this sample of digital feminist artists do not construct bodies with hegemonic value and are therefore not contributing to the imagery which maintains a global boys club. Therefore, internet users unfollow digital feminist artists, pushing them to the margins of Instagram culture in order to maintain representations of women which reaffirm dominant hegemonic values.

Whilst digital feminist artists negotiate Instagram's censorship policies, some of the women involved in this project questioned the origins and maintenance of the policies themselves. For example, Jenna notes how:

> You've got to look at who's actually sending out the messages of what needs to be censored, and a lot of the times they outsource their censorship, I know this is true for Facebook I'm assuming it's true for Instagram as well, they outsource all over the world to countries which might have a completely different moral codes from each other, and different sets of values about women's bodies, or even other things, a lot of things, and so there could perhaps be a more heavily misogynistic role at play in the censorship

Speaking directly to a structural understanding of moderation and censorship, Jenna points to how censorship helps to regulate a dominant worldview. As Gillespie (2018, 12) notes, most high-profile social media censorship policies are written and governed from a perspective which is 'overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly male, overwhelmingly educated, overwhelmingly liberal or libertarian, and overwhelmingly technical in skill'. Further, Gerrard (2020) explains how the people who create the rules reflect their worldview on the rules they make, meaning that censorship policies are never appropriately attuned to the needs of a diverse range of users. Suggesting that the views of mainly white, educated, men are objective and natural only reinforces a binary in which women's experiences and worldviews are unnatural. This means that a privileged epistemic position is maintained and reinforced through the architecture of Instagram by embedding dominant ways of knowing which claim universal

morality. Whilst content moderation and censorship policies work hard to emphasise their objectivity and neutrality (Bishop, 2020), they reveal their biased politics through the images that are routinely censored, such as digital feminist art. From this, we can see that content moderation at a structural level reinforces dominant ideology which stems from an epistemology of privilege. By creating rules which appear to be neutral and unbiased, Instagram naturalises the marginalisation and invisibility of digital feminist art and artists.

More specifically related to this project, this furthers the notion that the structure of Instagram replaces the structure of the museum. Not only do these policies reflect a dominant ideology regarding the representation of women's bodies, but they are also used to maintain a dominant view on what types of art are valuable and worthy of visibility. As shown throughout this chapter, visibility on Instagram is integral to digital feminist artists in this sample as it allows them to connect with people who can buy their work, collaborate with them, or host their work in group exhibitions. As well as this, Instagram is important for my sample of digital feminist artists to connect with and grow their audience, with their accounts acting as digital portfolios. Although they have a critical awareness of censorship policies, community guidelines, and the architecture of the platform, some digital feminist artists feel pressure to conform to Instagram's guidelines to maintain their career. Jenna expresses how "you have to succumb to it because Instagram has kind of become your entire calling card, so you can't take any risks, they hold the power over those expressions of your work". As such, to some extent, digital feminist artists must comply with guidelines in order to maintain a visible online presence.

With its established importance to this sample of digital feminist artists, Instagram's censorship of much of their work has led some of the women involved in this project to change the type of work that they upload in order to remain visible. For example, Sadie explained:

> I have a lot of problems with Instagram as a platform and with the way the algorithm works and the way they dictate what sort of art we're exposed to, I think that's very unfortunate because I think that it really spurs lots of different artists, myself included, into the direction of what the algorithm will find important to show to people and that takes away from what type of work we would make if Instagram didn't exist. Instagram has definitely created this other type of work that, I mean I still like it, but that's not how I thought I would see myself as an artist, and also, you know, you have to sort of post more or less constantly to keep your engagement rates decent so that people are exposed to your work, which means that I don't really have that much time to create

like a whole complete piece, like a more lengthy project, which I would have done before Instagram, now it's more like, oh it's been a month and I haven't posted anything, I need to find other clients, or I need to maintain some sort of relevance I'm going to slap a picture together, and alright it's fine but to me it's not what I would like to be doing

Sadie's experiences demonstrate the effect that Instagram's censorship has on the type of work that digital feminist artists produce. This is similar to Are's (2020) experiences of using Instagram. Her images on her profile showcase her dancing in order to gain access to more work opportunities and through Instagram's 'shadow banning', a light form of censorship which targets images which are considered vaguely inappropriate, her profile is hidden from the platform's explore page. This means that her profile cannot be promoted in ways which would benefit her work opportunities. Being conscious of this risk means that, as Sadie described, digital feminist artists change the work that they create to avoid the risk. The result of this change is often a particular style which denotes a consumable, less political, feminist aesthetic. Jenna explains how "the bubble gum girly Petra Collins style of work is what gets you far on Instagram" and goes further to discuss how

Everything has got to be given its due, and, you know, Petra Collins, and Arvida Byström, and these internet, post internet feminist artists, I mean you can't fault it can you, what they're doing is great but aesthetically, I get that it's ironic, I get that it's satirical but you have to question, is it actively politically driven feminist art or is it just that it's art made by women?

This feeds into broader discussions around the aestheticization of feminism and its relationship to contemporary popular culture (see Crepax, 2020; Murray, 2015). Instagram has given rise to a feminism which is concerned with aesthetics that centre around youthful femininity. In this, digital feminisms are often represented through embracing glitter, pastel colours, soft lighting, sequins and flowers, and neon pink quotes (Crepax, 2020). Such a style places femininity at the core of empowerment, and whilst this can initially be read as a positive as it is generally inclusive, its post-feminist sensibilities often suggest that it lacks the substance of the politics of feminism whilst borrowing its language and legacy (Gill, 2016). As we witness an increasing culture of digitalisation (Crepax, 2020), this feminist aesthetic gains momentum in terms of its value to the marketplace. Fashion magazines and mainstream clothing brands claim feminist values by employing this post-feminist, feminine aesthetic in order to monetise

the notion of empowerment. Whilst a more thorough and detailed discussion of feminist aesthetics and digital culture will feature in later chapters, the relevance here is that in order to maintain a strong feminist presence on Instagram with the view to access more opportunities for work and collaboration, digital feminist artists are compelled to change the style of their work to match with mainstream, commercial, and depoliticised depictions of feminism.

Returning to the concept of sensorship (Olszanowski, 2014), the rules that govern Instagram in terms of the censorship and algorithms, manage to simultaneously promote a specific type of feminism whilst also depoliticising feminism. By censoring work of digital feminist artists which deploys subjectivity as a way of challenging normative values, whilst promoting a feminist aesthetic which is useful to capitalism, Instagram takes on the role of the art museum and reinforces patriarchal ideology. In this sense, the work that digital feminist artists upload to their Instagram is governed by Instagram itself. Sadie outlines this sentiment:

> Because of Instagram I find that, although some of my works I do find personal and I do find artistic and I'm happy with them, but to be completely honest with you, you know, I would say half of the work I put up on my Instagram I wouldn't really even consider it as art, I would just consider it as just sort of an image that's aesthetically pleasing, but I mean it still goes with what I've been saying about empowering women so I guess you could interpret that as being artistic but, to be honest, to me, the pieces of mine which I consider as art carry on a certain emotion that maybe I was experiencing in real life when I wanted to abstractly project that onto the viewer as opposed to giving more of an aesthetical experience

Evidently, Instagram regulates feminist digital art and artists, as well as feminism more broadly through its censorship policies. By devaluing the personal, Instagram promotes a feminism which is universal, productive, commercial, and devoid of politics. Feminist art that does not adhere to normative ideology, in the experiences of this sample of digital feminist artists, is often censored or taken down from the platform, meaning that their opportunities for work are diminished and the more radical potential of feminism is also supressed. More broadly, although the internet has been considered a space where feminist art can thrive as feminist artists are no longer held back by their lack of access to traditional galleries (Sylvester, 2019), the censorship that governs what digital feminist art can be reproduces traditional gallery ideology which keeps women's subjectivities at the margins of art and wider society. As such, Jacobsen's (1991) argument that censorship is a gendered issue remains accurate. Although art

worlds have changed dramatically since her time of writing, with technology offering different methods and platforms for art, the sentiment of censorship remains. That being the ideological assumption that public expression is a natural entitlement of the dominant perspective. As a result, digital feminist art and artists are regulated by censorship within Instagram, meaning that their subjectivities, labour, and feminism as a concept are excluded from mainstream representation in order to reproduce and maintain normative social structure.

This section has continued a discussion of feminist resistance on Instagram, and has detailed the tensions inherent to the online practices of digital feminist artists in this sample. The most prominent issue with using Instagram is that a lot of the artwork that these digital feminist artists upload is reported or taken down due to breaching Instagram's censorship policies. The high levels of censorship point to how Instagram becomes a new type of art institution, borrowing from traditional ways of knowing about art. As such, Instagram's rules surrounding censorship mirror and perpetuate dominant ideology which serves to reinforce normative values and decrease the visibility of feminist politics. This is done primarily through sensoring, a concept which has been useful in exploring the ways in which women's subjectivities are devalued in favour of more normative depictions of women's bodies. Although digital feminist artists in this sample challenge the censorship of their work and their bodies by incorporating an aesthetics of censorship into their work and thus subverting censorship itself, the architecture of Instagram as a digital platform reinforces oppressive binaries. As a result, and in line with Instagram replacing traditional art institutions, Instagram dictates what type of feminist art is valuable and ultimately visible. This specific type of feminist art aligns with postfeminist sentiments, meaning that the type of feminist art that Instagram promotes is depoliticised and is useful to capitalism. Whilst links between feminist art and capitalism more broadly have been established in the literature review, the tensions between feminism and capitalism within this section demonstrate the nuances and complexities of digital feminist art practice on Instagram. Similarly, tensions surrounding representations of the body will be useful to explore in following chapters as this will further an evaluation of how digital feminist artists can use digital spaces as a means of resistance.

5.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have explored the role that Instagram plays in the experiences of digital feminist artists. I have underscored the importance of Instagram to digital feminist artists in this sample to make their work both visible and accessible, as well as outlining the challenges that come with existing as an artist on the platform. In this sense, Instagram is vital to the ways

in which digital feminist artists in my sample engage with the production of art, it is both a space of possibility and a space of censorship, meaning that digital feminist artists are in constant reflexive dialogue with the platform. I argue throughout this chapter that Instagram can be read as a specific site where feminist resistance can and does happen, and I also suggest that Instagram plays a central role in the regulation of feminist practice and activisms.

This chapter has addressed the first aim of this research, which is to critically examine the role of digital technologies within women's art practice and participation. In this chapter I have looked at the ways in which my sample of digital feminist artists engage with Instagram, particularly paying attention to how Instagram can function as a useful gallery space, which in turn has the potential to deinstitutionalise art spaces and make feminist art, and feminism more generally, more accessible to a wider audience. In this way, the use of Instagram as a tool of feminist resistance is clear. This accessibility also serves the feminist purpose of troubling binaries which are inherent to art world narratives specifically surrounding high and low culture and museum and market divides. This work then poses a further challenge to the epistemic basis of art worlds, and the production of knowledges about women and about women's art can be reworked to be more inclusive of women's perspectives.

This being said, whilst this type of feminist resistance continues to happen on Instagram, the relationship between digital feminist artists and Instagram as a technological platform is far from friendly. In this chapter, I looked at how this sample of digital feminist artists experienced resistance which stemmed directly from Instagram. I have discussed and demonstrated how their work is consistently reported and removed from Instagram, particularly when working with the body as subject matter. This type of censorship was explored and Olszanowski's (2014) work around sensorship was particularly useful in developing an account of how censorship from Instagram was about more than violating community guidelines, and actually working to censor their senses that surround the image.

This chapter has ultimately demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between digital feminist artists and technology. This is important because it helps us to understand that whilst technology can hold a space for feminism and feminist resistance, it actually does more work to restrict and regulate the production of a feminist visual culture which speaks from the position of women's embodied gendered experiences. This means that, whilst cyberfeminist ideas have been useful in helping to navigate understanding these experiences, the goals of cyberfeminism are not totally realised for my sample of digital feminist artists. Instead, I

suggest that technology acts as a further site of patriarchal social control particularly over representations of women's bodies and their experiences of them. In this way it is possible, and somewhat productive, to view Instagram specifically as an extension of traditional art world epistemologies which are founded upon patriarchal ideologies.

The following chapter will explore this concept in much more detail and depth. In focusing further on the concept of representation and how this is experienced by digital feminist artists in this research will shed light on how feminist resistance can be activated through notions of representation. In this, I will explore how digital feminist artists in my sample reclaim the female nude in order to develop a specific feminist visual language, as well as how a female gaze might be a useful way of conceptualising the experiences of digital feminist artists.

Chapter 6: Representations in digital feminist art

6.1 Introduction

As stated by Howson (2005), feminism is both implicit and explicit in how it informs women's artwork, making it an impossible task to separate feminist theory from artistic practice. From this, it is useful to firstly outline some key feminist theoretical debates pertaining to representation in feminist art. Whilst there are broader discussions of this theme in chapter two, here I offer a more focused narrative surrounding representation and women's bodies in feminist art as this is the main concern of the digital feminist artists engaged in this project. Contemporary women's art draws on and builds from feminist theory, focusing this into their representations of bodies. The female body in particular signifies a specific value within the realm of visual representation, and this is largely due to the proliferation of the female nude in the western tradition whereby male artists had monopoly of representation. The female nude is a deeply contested site situated at the intersection of history, culture, science, and politics, whereby it signifies a common bond whilst offering a public separation of identities including gender, class, and race (Ewing, 1994). Through this, the body becomes situated as an object of social and political theories upon which values are inscribed for political needs (Pro'Sobopha, 2011).

Further, these images of the female nude provided an idealised version of woman as the object of a specific male gaze which begins from and maintains a binary based on the notion of natural sexual difference, where the female nude acts as the possession of a male spectator (Mulvey, 1975; Berger, 1972). The challenge to such representations was informed mainly by second wave women's movements, which advocated that the personal was political and worked to disrupt narratives of art history by transgressing cultural conceptions of gender in art (Nochlin, 1989; McRobbie, 1990; Pollock, 1988). This political movement emphasised how personal issues were constituted by political and social conditions and this encouraged women to consider their private experiences in broader political terms. Second wave feminist movements particularly stressed how women's bodies had been medicalised and pathologized from a colonised medical profession, and from this feminist activism focused on generating an awareness of women's bodies from women's perspective in order to resist oppressive narratives (Magubane, 2004; Ruzek, 1978). As a central part of this motion, a lot of feminist art focused explicitly on the female body as a further challenge to this colonisation of the body.

The emergence of works of art by women which focused so explicitly and intimately on the body should be understood as part of a wider, more general response to the political, social, and cultural world which at the time conceived of women through a male gaze. The conscious awareness of anatomy and embodiment stemming from second wave feminist movements laid the groundwork for feminist artists to further resist the knowledges produced about women and instead, prioritise their shared bodily experiences as sources of knowledge. Emphasising the privilege of experience, women's art from this period focused explicitly on the visceral and corporeal aspects of embodiment and this resulted in significant amounts of performance art which make private realities publicly consumable, and an abundance of work signifying vaginal iconography (Wilson, 2014; Middleman, 2013). This was a direct resistance of how women's bodies had been known not only within the tradition of art history, but also science, medicine, and popular culture. Where women's bodies and experiences had been manufactured and governed by the oppressive workings of patriarchal capitalism, feminist art borne from second wave women's movements at once exposed patriarchal epistemologies whilst constructing different ways of knowing through their representations of embodiment (Howson, 2005). A focus on pain, desire, pleasure, and suffering in these works offered an abrupt critique of medicalisation and objectification in that they reclaimed women's bodies as not objects, but experiences in their own right, and this retrieval of representations acted as a relinquishing of shame, which enshrines women's bodies in patriarchal western culture (Spence, 1995).

Whilst the emergence of this work is easily celebrated as liberating in that they signify an important historical shift within art worlds as well as in ways of knowing about women, it is also widely contested and challenged. The explicitness of vaginal iconography begs the question of reductivism, perhaps only strengthening the biological basis of sexual difference and further contributes to the construction of women as inferior to men (for further discussion see Phelan, 2001; Pollock, 1996; Johnson, 2006; Meagher, 2011). Further, another symptom of 1970s women's movements are that they noticeably exclude black women in their narratives. As such, art that focuses on women's experiences as universal are effectively only referring to white, heterosexual, middle class experiences despite the existing parallels between the black power and women's liberation movements of the time (Collins, 2006).

Moving from these critiques, and also chronologically, the 1980s witnessed a different feminist visual language which was in conversation with the academic notions of postmodernism (Brodsky & Olin, 2008). Feminist art in this period was characterised by representing the feminine but without resting femininity on female bodies as a direct response

to notions of deconstructing the gaze and considering objectification as both subject and object. It is this irony that distinguishes feminist art within this theme, as representations of femaleness use patriarchally defined ideals to represent patriarchal structures (Cottingham, 1989). This ultimately bends the definitions of woman set out in binary terms, constructing a newer, more abstract and ambiguous ontology from which to represent women's experiences (McRobbie, 1990). Whilst this offered exciting new perspectives, since this period there has been a shift to a greater focus back onto the body, but with greater awareness of feminist theory. Returning to the body as a site of representation stems from the lack of explicit political motivation in the postmodern tradition and calls for a re-embodying move in order to more authentically represent women's experiences. In this, an embodied perspective attempts to both resist and resolve the disembodiment that characterises modernity (Betterton, 1996; Gatens, 1996).

Whilst a historical overview of women's art is not the aim of this project, and a more thorough and detailed discussion of these ideas can be found in chapter two, these ideas about representation are presented here as they form a critical component of the practices of the digital feminist artists involved in this project and so also underscores much of the future analysis in this chapter. The women involved all grappled with ideas of embodiment, the gaze, and sexuality as part of their practice and it is important to give weight to the legacy from which their understandings arise. Representation remains a central component of feminist thinking outside of art practices too, and so digital feminist artists can be understood as contributing to wider feminist politics which both underpins and inspires their practice. Specifically relating to this project, and as demonstrated in chapters two and five, women who are artists have struggled to be represented in traditional art spaces and this urges women artists to move into different, digital spaces. Taking this idea into the broader field, chapter three grappled with issues of representation in terms of how to authentically capture women's voices and struggled through the messiness of what representing women's experiences can and should look like within an academic canon. Before moving on to discuss the content of analysis in the present chapter, it feels necessary to highlight how representation as a feminist concept is so integral to this project, through all of the fractured accounts of experience as well as the construction of this document itself. This sets the precedence for the analysis here by exposing how representation is built into the fabric of feminist thinking not only in terms of women's position in art worlds, but also in terms of the knowledges that are constructed from the standpoint of academic feminism as a discipline as well as a lived, embodied experience. Thus, the concept of representation is not simply a broad and abstract concept, but an analysis

dedicated to the specific types of representation which this project speaks to, and from here offers an extension of how we can understand representation from the standpoint of digital feminist artists in this sample.

The previous chapter engaged with some integral debates to the study of women's relationship with visual culture, specifically art made by women. In this, the chapter explored the epistemological underpinnings of art worlds, the visibility of artists who are women, and ways in which digital feminist art poses a challenge to the binaries inherent to traditional art spaces. Whilst those previous discussions detailed experiences of censorship and regulation relating to digital feminist artist's use of Instagram as exhibition space, it also argued that the use of Instagram can be understood as an act of feminist resistance. This chapter contributes to this central argument and develops it further by exploring the art that digital feminist artists in this sample exhibit, as well as the practices of art marking and reflections on such practices. In essence, the analysis unpacked here provides an exploration of why and how the concept of representation is central to the construction of feminist resistance. As will be explored, representation features as a further tool of resistance for this sample of digital feminist artists, who create artwork with the aims of reclaiming the female nude, constructing a feminist visual language with which to represent the body, and imaging a female gaze. Throughout these discussions, this chapter argues that digital feminist artists in my sample use their digital platforms to resist patriarchal and exploitative mainstream representations of women's bodies and identities. They do this by drawing on feminist histories especially as they relate to art production, consciously reflecting on the representations in their work, and responding to contemporary configurations of the male gaze in the digital cultures in which they are situated. As such, this chapter offers an intricate and detailed analysis of how representations of the body matter to this sample of digital feminist artists in the work that they exhibit and how such representations contribute to a broader feminist resistance both politically as well as personally for the artists themselves.

All of the women involved in this project spoke about representation in some way. As feminist artists, all of the participants engaged with thinking about representation through their work and often focused on gender as a subject to be explored. In this way, some women worked with the concept of gender to explore relationships between men and women and how the body is a central component of relationships between them and is symbolic of power. Others focused on embodied gendered experiences such as sex and shame. Some participants were concerned with representing marginalised identities and so studied queer cultures, relationships, and

identities in their art. Above all, all of the women involved worked with a conscious understanding of mainstream representations of women and the effects that these have on gendered experiences and actively strove to challenge these by reflecting on their practice and engaging their work with debates around representation more broadly. Whilst the following discussions centre around personal challenges with the concept of representation and point to very varied and individualised artistic practice among the artists involved, the digital nature of their practice allows a reading of representation beyond, but inclusive of, personal and quiet acts of reflection and resistance. With this, the experiences of the women involved in this project point to a struggle between representation and censorship which furthers discussions of regulation as noted in the previous analysis chapter. Here, the restrictions on what can and cannot be visible especially on Instagram are clearly discussed in conversation with feminist arguments regarding representation, ultimately contributing to an understanding of how the gendered experiences of this sample of digital feminist artists are mediated through the digital spaces in which they curate and exhibit, and how such restriction informs the representations that matter within their art.

6.2 Representing the body

Representing the body has been of central importance to feminist artists throughout a history of feminism and different types of representation have been important alongside different feminist movements as noted in the introduction to this chapter. This is mainly due to feminist analysis of art historical discourse which has, as previously discussed in the literature review, objectified women's bodies within the visual arts and contributed to patriarchal structures which maintain the boundaries of gender (Nochlin, 1989; Parker & Pollock, 1981). Whilst this may be a simplistic reading of the working of representation pertaining to a contemporary western context, critiques of such a patriarchal-slanted view of art invite vibrant and creative alternative ways of imagining the role of gender not only within artistic representations, but within our embodied selves as well. As such, representation can be understood to play a large role within the structures of society and politics, which underpin our embodied identities. The objectified female body within visual culture works to naturalise the subordinate position of women within a gendered hierarchy, and this objectified imagery proliferates many arenas of visual culture. The literature review discussed sexist tropes of women within art history. From this we understand how women have always been central to visual culture, visible as object of culture rather than acknowledged as being cultural producers in their own right (Pro'Sobopha, 2005). In this sense, women have been the muse or the model, but rarely the artists. This means

that although representations of women's bodies are prevalent within visual culture, representations of their subjectivity, experiences, and knowledges from their positions in the world have been excluded from mainstream visual narratives and are limited to the arena labelled as feminist or women's art (Carson, 2000). This means that the knowledges that are produced and consumed through visual culture maintain a social division which is naturalised through the reproduction of such narratives.

6.2.1 Reclaiming the female nude

Chapter four noted how digital feminist artists in my sample are actively inserting their subjectivities into Instagram by using their bodies in the work that they exhibit online, consciously rewriting art historical narratives whilst neutralising the power in their bodies being objectified and challenging the dichotomy of who can look and who can be looked at (see Olszanowski, 2014). These same themes of power and objectification remain central to this chapter in the same way that they remain central to the politics and the practices of the digital feminist artists who took part in this project. This section works from the knowledge produced regarding their use of Instagram and the censorship that takes place within that platform, and zones in on how representation of the female nude is a core component to these discussions.

The main reason that the images that some of the women exhibited on Instagram were censored is that they included nudity. Nudity is considered to be a violation of Instagram's community guidelines stated under the appropriate imagery category, which states 'we don't allow nudity on Instagram, with some exceptions, like photos of post-mastectomy scarring and women actively breastfeeding. Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is ok, too' (Instagram, 2018). As noted previously, although censorship is a something that my participants contend with regularly, they persistently work with representations of the body and nudity in order to challenge representations of women in mainstream visual culture that they feel are prevalent. For example, Beth expressed how 'nowadays you only see nude women and that's why I started to photograph them myself, because it's all you see but it's really the same every time' and Victoria mentioned how 'I just feel that women have been represented as a mannequin for so long'. The idea that mainstream visual culture is adorned with sexualised imagery of women's bodies was largely shared among the digital feminist artists interviewed, and the representations within their own work sought to directly challenge this. In articulating this idea further, Nina explains how she considers representing the body in her own work:

> I'm always trying to constantly try to answer the question of can a woman in a sexually provocative, or let's say sexual state of play, can she also be powerful and not just solely be viewed as an object or like from the perspective of the gaze?

Nina goes on to express how she works with these themes because she is 'really wanting to push inclusivity and diversity and reject the idolised patriarchal version of a beautiful female body'. The urge to push back at sexualised representations of women's bodies can be understood initially as an act of feminist resistance. By centralising the female nude, a trope of sexualised imagery both within art worlds and popular culture, and using sexuality or sensuality as a subject matter, which is attributed to the naked female body, Nina reclaims narratives of sexualisation and subverts them by using a female gaze, a concept which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. By being the active producer of representations of women's sexuality within the sphere of art, Nina uses the female nude to construct knowledges from the perspective of women. In doing this, she readdresses women's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1975) and in doing so, situates women as active agents in the production of both visual culture and of narratives of women's sexuality more broadly. On closer inspection, the representations within Nina's work are described as powerful and confident, and this too can be understood as posing a direct challenge to the trope of the female nude, who is always depicted in a submissive state, under a sexually dominant male gaze (De Lauretis, 1987; Metz, 1982; Mulvey, 1975; Berger, 1977).

The urge to represent women's sexuality as powerful and confident is something that has happened within feminist art since early women's movements and contributes to a reclaiming of the body and sexuality (for further examples see Meagher, 2009). The sexually liberated, confident, and powerful female nude is something that other digital feminist artists involved in this project were also interested in representing in order to challenge patriarchal sexualised imagery and reclaim representations of women's sexuality. Christine explains how she works with these themes in her own work:

> I'm inspired to like, not show women in this weakened state but to show them as this powerful dynamic that they literally, I could be better at, but that's what's lacked previously and that's what the theme of that show is, so basically I always just try and show women in a powerful way

Christine's approach to representation is reminiscent of the 1970's women's movement's calls to reclaim the body from both medical regulation of the time and from the ways in which art

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history has forgotten women's narratives in the production of the female nude (see Fields, 2012). She recognises that representations of women reproduce a binary between powerful and weak, and that this is a gendered binary which is used to maintain women's subordination within social life. By actively working with this tension and representing power within her own work, Christine not only reproduces the image of the woman in a way that subverts the binary hinged upon gender, but she also places women at the centre of art making which subverts the dichotomy of artist/model and forges pathways for knowledge production from the standpoints of women. Linda Tickner's (1978, 247) early work is useful here when she argues that the only solution to challenge knowledges about women and their sexuality produced through visual culture is to 'grasp and reconstruct it, through the exposure and contradiction of the meanings it conveys'. She goes on to suggest that in order to challenge and resist cultural depictions of women, women need to be liberated from the art making process itself rather than liberated in a broader and generalised sense of the term.

Before moving on to further discuss the contradictions in the meanings of the work of the digital feminist artists involved here and ruminating on their tensions and struggles within their work, I do want to argue that digital feminist artists in this sample are reconstructing the meanings of representation within visual culture by their persistence in *being* artists. Whilst their struggles as workers have been documented in the previous analysis chapter, their commitment to maintaining their presence on Instagram as women who are artists slowly liberates the notion of art making to be inclusive of women as producers of art outside of the traditional gallery setting. As such, the conditions which oppress them as women are the very conditions on which they produce art, meaning that there are pockets of power in that producing visual culture is a precondition for the expression of gender and sexuality. Therefore, by challenging the gendered basis within the epistemology of art worlds, digital feminist artists liberate art making for women, and this in turn gives greater weight to the challenges that the female nude represented in their work pose to representations of the body within a western tradition.

6.2.2 Constructing a feminist visual language

This being said, and returning to the concept of binaries, the visual language that is used to grasp and redefine the female nude is a product of patriarchal capitalism and we must assess to what extent this hinders the liberatory and subversive potential of digital feminist art. Feminist theorists have pointed to how there is no language created in a value-free way which would allow women to reinvent visual culture (Nochlin, 1973; Ellmann, 1986). Further, Ellmann

(1968) argues that only the images which are created and managed from patriarchal social structures are recognisable as gendered imagery and are therefore the only tools that women have to reimagine and reconstruct representations of the body. All of our experiences of the body are maintained through languages produced at the exclusion of women's standpoints, so it is particularly difficult to rebuild and reimagine visual culture whilst only working with the tools of patriarchal ideology. This complexity inherent to feminist thinking is something that is consciously grappled with by some of the women who participated in this project. Nina communicates this issue in her reflections on her work. It is worth presenting her words at length in order to covey the tensions and complexities in her thinking:

> I'm trying to, and attempting to figure out how to subvert the gaze through… or through like attempting to walk the thin line between heightening awareness of female empowerment and agency while trying not to like, objectify the female and so there's… It's difficult because there's… so my research question, you know, I've always studied and researched the theory behind or I have studied and researched female representation art and the problematic and yet political discourse it holds and so, but what I'm interested in is exploring, like, is there a politically correct way to depict a woman, or to depict a sexually charged female nude in art or will the image be always under scrutiny and criticisms or objectification or exploitation?

Nina points to the very political basis of feminist art making and demonstrates a thoughtful approach to the ways in which representation contributes to knowledges about women. The binary between empowerment and objectification speaks to this notion that there is no language to understand representation beyond patriarchy and that if there can be no empowerment, then the only other option is objectification. This resonates more broadly in that this struggle of power is the basis of gendered hierarchy, whereby gendered experiences are produced and embodied through visual culture and maintained through representations of women's bodies in the form of the female nude (Nead, 1992). Although digital feminist artists work to reclaim objectified representations of women's bodies by reappropriating the female nude in their work, because their representations can only be known within the confines of patriarchal language, their work does run the risk of accommodating patriarchal tropes rather than challenging them. The awareness of such a risk is evident in Nina's comments, but this process is also shared with other digital feminist artists in this sample. For example, Christine explained how:

> I'll always do some work then I question it and think like, did I, was I exploring it or was I exploiting, and thinking why did I do this is it an actual desire that comes from me originally or is it from something I grew up with and was told by other men to look at other women a certain way, to sexualise them that way, so I battle that a lot and I think I figure that out through my work and I don't have to have all the answers and I have to remind myself of that, that's I'm playing around with ideas

This idea of process, of not having a solid position is in itself a subversion of a binary because it unsettles the very notion of binary thinking. Because Christine consciously works with themes of sexuality and explores this from her perspective as a woman, she uses the trope of the female nude to demonstrate the exploitative representations of women's sexuality within traditional western art contexts. As she recognises, by doing this she walks a fine line between exploration and exploitation, because she uses the same techniques of representation as earlier imagery of the female nude. Whilst Tickner (1978) suggests that the play of sexualised imagery paired with a feminist politics holds a lot of power in its tiptoeing of that binary between exploration and exploitation, Rosler (2001) would disagree. For Rosler (2001), being a woman representing women is not necessarily a subversive political claim in itself, and she suggests that in order to fully challenge the politics of representation, then women cannot continue to produce art that is recognisable as art. Instead, they should make contradicting and ambiguous imagery which embraces new media forms.

Ambiguity is a key focus of Nina's work, as she explains how:

> Because I feel that there's been a lot of talk about, you know, in order to capture the female gaze the woman always has to look passive and docile and not super suggestive or, sometimes, and very ambiguous like there is not one form or shape of the body, its infinite you know, almost has like a sublime quality where there's no frame around it, and that adds to like a different way of looking at the female body

Nina highlights the relationship between the politics of the gaze and the techniques used to communicate feminist politics within the scope of the work. She recognises the legacy of postmodernism within feminist representations in her discussion of forms and shapes of the body. Postmodern ideas became relevant to feminist art as a shift away from the explicit focus on the material experiences of the body made so prevalent in the second wave women's movements, instead offering a challenge to the regulating gaze placed upon women which emphasises an idealised image (Mulvey, 1975). The resistance to the gaze brought about more

work aiming to deconstruct the meanings inherent to the female nude and this manifested in disrupting the techniques used to depict the body. As such, 'the production of visual images engaged with the female body, without reducing femininity to the body, and relied on tactics such as reframing, juxtaposition, and reflexive manipulation to highlight various ways in which ideas about the female body and femininity are constructed' (Howson, 2005, 49). Returning to Nina's work, she too employs the same techniques in order to further resist and challenge an oppressive gaze. This at once makes explicit the core engagement with feminist theory in the practices of digital feminist artists in this sample, and also outlines how the attempt to construct a new visual language for feminism remains critical.

This ambiguous style, although central to the politics of their practice and their work, is still a point of contention for some digital feminist artists in my sample. Nina continues:

> I mean the female body is multi-layered and complex so in my drawings I want to convey these complexities through arrangements of contour lines and shapes, forms... although the forms are somewhat exaggerated in certain areas sometimes the bodies are not exactly like the body, like the proportions are not specific so they sometimes obscure, but I do not want to distort any part of the body

When asked about why she wanted to work with techniques grounded in postmodern ideas but without distorting the body, Nina struggled over her response. We worked through the ways in which the language that we share as English speakers, itself fails to allow women the space in art to discuss their own work without falling into patriarchal ideas about art. Ultimately Nina settled on these thoughts, presented at length in order to express her process of ideas:

> Critical theorists or historians, or contemporary theorists, whatever, you know, sometimes I hear them say that's the only way to produce a strong female gaze [distorting female bodies], well, I'm female so my gaze is female but sometimes they're like, no, that's not true. It's weird because well… maybe you have to distort the image a bit, like women can only be seen from a female gaze if they don't really have a form, the more ambiguous the better. I think there are positive ways to represent the female body in contemporary art without distorting the body and I'm really wanting to investigate that in ways that push inclusivity and diversity and reject the idealised patriarchal version of a beautiful female body

I am reminded again of Linda Nochlin's (1973, 11) seminal work in which she expresses how 'those who have no country have no language' referring to how women have no publicly

accepted language, visually or otherwise, available to fully articulate their viewpoint. This sentiment weighs particularly heavily here both in the discussions between researcher and researched as well as in the practices of the artist herself. Nina clearly takes on the task of resisting patriarchal visual language that represents the body in ways that regulate it in line with oppressive gender binaries. Moreover, the paternalistic tradition of art worlds means that the only option she has is to use techniques generated from a masculinist tradition which is inherently binary. Her struggle then emerges in that she cannot discuss her work, nor represent the body outside of patriarchal structures. So, although taking strides to move away from the essentialist connotations of representing the corporeality of women's bodies in the form of the female nude, the ambiguities of her work still rest on a binary in which women cannot be looked at from a feminist visual standpoint.

McRobbie (1990) has also grappled with these tensions and notably criticises a postmodern approach to feminist artwork, arguing that postmodern women's art stifles the radical potential of women's art and blocks feminism from taking new directions within art spaces. A central component of her argument is that ambiguous signifiers, the lines, shapes, and proportions that Nina tells us about in her work, are not overtly symbolic of feminism, and so the images produced in this way cannot necessarily be read as feminist. The ambiguity of the postmodern tradition allows multiple possibilities of imagining the politics of the work and this ultimately works to neutralise the feminist basis of the image. Whilst a direct and explicit reference to feminism is not necessarily the only signifier of a feminist politics, postmodernism does not allow space for an evaluation of art as part of a broader canon on 'women's art'. Because the notion of a unified category of art made by a specific gendered group is not made clear within postmodern interpretations, there can be no explicit reference to feminism, and this makes it difficult to conceptualise the work as specifically feminist. Therefore, the origins from which the artwork is produced, in the embodied material conditions of the digital feminist artists in this case, become another possibility rather than the central language of the work. This means that although attempting to construct a new visual language akin to feminist embodiment, the techniques and tools used to challenge the gaze ultimately further contribute to the silencing of feminist politics.

Additionally, DiStefano (1990) contributes to the foundation of this critique by arguing that in terms of epistemology, the enlightenment solidifies the position of men (namely white, middle class men) within a structured social system, so that they can afford to indulge in postmodernist ideas which deconstruct and decentre their claims to truths. For women on the other hand, she

suggests that to build an alliance with postmodernism is to destabilise something which is not yet stable. Ultimately her critique points to the idea that postmodernism is established outside of materiality and structure, and so has the power to dismantle feminism. By definition, feminism is a unity of the social position of woman within a structured social world and it is this unity which postmodernism would seek to dismantle. Within this project, I am not at all suggesting that feminism is a unified position. From the outset I have argued for the need to explore difference and fractures within gendered experiences to construct new feminist knowledges, and as will be demonstrated in following sections, the women interviewed also advocated for the inclusion of difference within their representations and ideas about feminism. This being said, the concept of feminism as a unified historical way of knowing was at the forefront of the new visual languages that many of the women work to construct and it would be unfair not to give weight to the value placed on feminist art histories, and the epistemological understandings they constructed in the quest of representation of the body.

In the subtle and quiet ways that narratives of feminism inform my sample of digital feminist artists, there emerges a language of which to speak of feminist art, to notice particular representations of particular bodies as feminist within women's art, or beyond. Many of the women, some who worked from postmodern techniques themselves, spoke of the importance of feminist artists and feminist movements with historical significance. For example, Nina told me that:

> Feminist artists that have come before me are very important to my practice, and what they have said and what they have contributed and how the conversations have moved through the years and how they haven't too

The explicit importance placed on feminist artists who have 'come before' speaks to a broader sense of how this sample of digital feminist artists, within the representations that they produce, rework traditional art historical narratives into a language imbued with a feminist politics, which alter the patriarchal undertones of such narratives. Since the construction of a new feminist visual language is essentially epistemologically impossible as we have seen, digital feminist artists here tackle representations of the body by reimagining and reworking the structures of representation and negotiate them with a critical edge to construct a specific feminist political critique. Although these ideas are indebted to postmodernism, digital feminist artists borrow these techniques within their work to move beyond a postmodernism as it relates to representations of the body. As such, digital feminist artists are not only challenging how

women's bodies have been represented through their creative practices, but by doing this they are also challenging the disciplinary knowledge constructed by art history. Visual culture continuously produces knowledges hinged on structural binaries, so by revisiting feminist art history through their material productions, digital feminist artists continue to rewrite these knowledges to resist and reimagine social life for women.

More specifically, the concept of 're-citing' is employed by Victoria Horne (2015) in her analysis of the work of feminist artist Kate Davis. Horne (2015, 44) explains how within the context of women's art, re-citing 'means to summon, or call, to set in motion, and it is in this fluid sense that younger women artists respond to, play with and extend the legacies of their feminist forebears, rather than ambivalently or even antagonistically confronting the same'. Within this sample, this statement bears particular significance. The emphasis and influence of earlier feminist art figures is palpable in both the images they created and the ways in which they understood their identities as women and as digital artists. Horne suggests that Kate Davis continues a maternal artistic heritage in her work by re-visiting feminist art from the second wave not in a nostalgic way, but a way to trace a trajectory of feminist struggle and instil the politics of that early work into her own. From re-citing feminist art history, she extends the work of her matrilineal heritage by intervening in the patrilineal narratives of art history. Ultimately her re-citing of feminist histories helps to move beyond debates around postmodernism in order to reimagine the politics of second wave feminism into a politics more representative of women's experiences today. Incidentally, Jenna, one of the women who took part in this project, named Kate Davis when we spoke about her own ideas about feminist histories:

> For me personally I'm just really drawn towards like, you know, like Tracey Emin *My Bed* or Jenny Holzer *projections on buildings*, or you know, Louise Bourgeois, or yeah, Adrian Piper she's a great one, Francesca Woodman, and Kate Davis who does really interesting stuff

It is evident that Jenna values the work of feminist artists who have come before her and this informs the ways in which she approaches her own work, continuing Horne's (2015) thinking in relation to matrilineal heritage as a specific language of which to discuss feminist art. Jenna shares with Kate Davis a similar understanding of how working from the inheritance of feminist histories can reactivate the politics of the representations whilst moving into more contemporary feminist issues. Where second wave feminist art represented the corporeal

elements of women's bodies to resist the objectifying male gaze, the legacy lives on in different forms, notably digital feminist art in this particular case. As such, there is a language to speak to feminist art. Perhaps this is not overly explicit in the techniques used in representing the body as we have seen, but it is in the shared sense of feminist art history forged between generations of women artists who continue to politicise art making within the context of their own lives. As such, this language of heritage pursues the notion that feminism is not something that has happened, rather it is something that is happening. This bears particular importance in a digital context, as will be explored more critically in the following chapter, whereby neoliberal postfeminist sensibilities dominate online spaces which ultimately communicate that feminism is no longer relevant to contemporary social life (for further discussions see Elias & Gill, 2018; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).

Feminist movements continue to shift, and the politics of feminism which are dragged through generations of women artists remain present in the representations of the body created by digital feminist artists. In returning to earlier discussions of how sexuality is represented, I suggest that digital feminist artists in my sample use re-citing strategies in order to re-focus sexuality within their representations of women's bodies. This both actively resists representations of the body which sexualise women, and also contributes to the production of contemporary feminist narratives which inscribes art historical knowledge with a feminist politics. For example, Nina outlines how:

> Now in the past couple of years like obviously with fourth wave feminism and the rise of the internet, it's been a huge political wave for me and it has really influenced me and my work because of the sex positive movement, especially now in the age of #Metoo and free the nipple, they have been amazing waves and movements that address and challenge patriarchal structures and speak out against slut shaming and sexual harassment and assault, and for me I really do find myself inspired by the online community

The acknowledgement of current feminist narratives within contemporary culture allows digital feminist artists in this sample to continue the matrilineal heritage of politicising art whilst working from their own experiences as people entrenched in online visual culture. Beth expresses the timeliness of digital feminist art in relation to the body:

> Because of this wider access to the internet, I think this is the time which asks for discussion about bodies because we need to learn, or see, we need to revaluate how we look at bodies

This speaks directly to why representations of the body matter to digital feminist art. The space that they occupy as digital artists gives them a viewpoint from within in which to detail their experiences of occupying digital spaces as women. This perspective invites feminist artists to reimagine women's bodies in the works that they produce, and to work with imagery that proliferates digital culture in order to reassess, redefine, and refocus visual culture to assess women's sexuality within contemporary culture.

One way that digital feminist artists in this sample refocused sexuality in representations of the body is through using traditionally sexist tropes in their work to reclaim the body as feminist and disrupt the ways in which the body has been presented as a site of sexual consumption (Goodman, 2017). Christine was explicit in the way that she did this in her work:

> There's times when I'm shooting a film or some photography and its extremely sexual, which is just what we say is sexual, what is deemed sexual, things like if she's topless then that photo is deemed as sexual so I do have a lot of that typically sexist imagery, but I shoot in more of an uncomfortable, disturbing way that I wouldn't feel is stereotypically sexual so it's like I'm mixing them together to create a portrait of a woman with all of these sexist tropes

Notably, Christine uses these sexist tropes seen in advertising and mass media to challenge their meanings within a digital context. She takes knowledges which have been produced within both visual culture and art history that work to highlight women's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' through the display of the nude female form (Mulvey, 1975), and disrupts them by exposing them as tropes rather than as truths. Her feminist resistance can be seen in the way that she depicts women's bodies using these tropes but imbues them with a feminine subjectivity so that the sexuality inherent to the images is forged around the interior life of her subject, rather than the external bodily connotations of the sexual. By representing her subjects as agentic and sexual women, Christine calls attention to the legacy of presenting women's bodies as passive objects of desire. Her obviously and overtly sexualised bodies enact agency in that they communicate a desire which stems from women themselves, rather than a desire from the audience. Sadie, another digital feminist artist, has similar ideas:

> I like having female characters who are portrayed as sexual characters but rather than being objectified they're confronting the viewer with either the way that they are placed or how they look back at the camera and showing the viewer how women are sexual beings who own their sexuality

The revisioning of sexualised tropes of the female body is a longstanding strategy within feminist visual culture, as we have seen throughout this chapter. Speaking of her own experiences in an interview with AnOther magazine Carolee Schneeman, feminist artist prominent within second wave movements, expressed how her work in 1963 'was working against the inheritance of passive nudes' (Rosen, 2020) and goes on to explore how critics of her work suggested that she was playing into sexist tropes. Having the same conversations and debates about the body and sexuality now five decades later, we can clearly see how this reclaiming and revisioning of the female nude is part of a feminist language of representation. In this sense, although the tropes of the female nude which denote sexualisation, objectification, and consumption are inherent to patriarchal epistemology which structures visual culture as well as social relations, techniques of reclaiming and reworking the female nude is emblematic of feminist visual culture and the language of resistance. As such, sexuality as identified through the trope of the female nude is continuously negotiated as part of a broader feminist struggle. Whilst we consume sexualised imagery in our everyday lives, as outlined throughout this chapter, and in doing so inherit gendered binaries, this sample of digital feminist artists simultaneously inherit a toolkit of feminist strategies in order to resist these narratives and refocus sexuality into disruptions of these binaries.

This back and forth between oppression and resistance has a specific significance when considering the spaces in which digital feminist art can be accessed. Ideas pertaining to space will be further discussed in the next analysis chapter but is worth introducing here as it is pertinent to the representations of the body in this context. I have previously detailed how Instagram is a main space for my sample of digital feminist artists to exhibit their work and have explored how censorship is a central part of this experience. As briefly mentioned, feminism's fourth wave is core to the work that this sample of digital feminist artists are undertaking. So, whilst the representations of the body and sexuality within the work from these digital feminist artists can be understood as continuing the matrilineal heritage of feminist politics to refocus gendered structures, this does not happen in a vacuum. The centrality of technology in fourth wave feminism asks different questions and poses different challenges

than those of second wave feminism and this needs to be explored more carefully to help understand how resistance can happen within this context.

6.3 A female gaze

Discussions within this chapter have pointed towards a female gaze, and some concepts relating to the gaze are peppered throughout. This section engages in a more thorough discussion of the concept of the gaze and how this relates to representation and resistance for my sample of digital feminist artists. All of the digital feminist artists spoke about gaze during our discussions, and a large emphasis was placed on how their specific gaze as women was helpful in their work and in their reflections on their identities through the practical *doing* their work. In this sense, a female gaze is not necessarily an essential, biological quality of being female, but rather it is a tool of reflection and a means of resistance which subverts women's to be looked at ness by challenging the direction of a typical male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). In this way, and as will be discussed throughout, gaze is a tool of introspection rather than spectatorship, and is used to explore gender relations as well as gendered experiences of the body. A further act of feminist resistance which rests on the concept of the gaze is the use of Instagram. Although this has been discussed in the previous analysis chapter, here I assess the extent to which the focus on technology as a theme within the work of this sample of digital feminist artists paired with its exhibition in online spaces challenges our notions of looking as it relates to technology. Moreover, the expectations of viewing, or spectatorship, that accompany the use of the internet are challenged by my sample of digital feminist artists by subverting such expectations to disrupt patriarchal narratives surrounding women's bodies and sexuality.

6.3.1 Representing the male nude

The concept of the female gaze is active in the process of some digital feminist artists in my sample. Specifically, Beth placed a lot of importance on thinking about the politics of the female gaze within her work and she spoke at length about her projects which involved photographing nude male bodies. She focuses on the male nude because:

> It was always very normal for men to look at women, and I think that for a long time the female gaze was very underrepresented... maybe the development of the internet went way faster than the development of our norms and values about bodies, I don't know

As noted earlier in this chapter as well as here, Beth's consideration of the gaze between men and women is exacerbated due to the proliferation of online culture in everyday lives and she

makes this power structure of seeing and being seen in digital ways a core focus of her work. Talking through her ideas of how the gaze is fundamental to her practice as well as to the work that she produces, Beth explained:

> This project is exploring the nude male body and the underrepresentation of the nude male in media and also the reaction towards this underrepresentation. It's really about the interaction with each other so my body is represented one way and the male body another way, so I am always thinking, can I influence how I'm being looked at? Or how do I present myself when someone is photographing me? And also the other way around, how is it when a man is the model and is being watched? And how am I performing as a maker? As a photographer? I'm interested in the roles we take on in the power structure

These reflexive questions demonstrate the ways in which feminist resistance can happen within art by disrupting patriarchal gendered scripts which maintain an oppressive social structure for women. A gender binary based on viewer/viewed is maintained through the mass consumption of the female body within visual culture, where it has been suggested that the consumption of representations of the nude female body is an interactive process of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). For men, the act of looking expresses a dominant masculine position, and for women, the act of looking reflects expectations of womanhood (Berger, 1972). Although there has been a notable rise in the prevalence of the sexualised male body particularly within advertising and marketing, these images are less available for sexualisation and objectification because of the binary of viewer/viewed which remains constant (Eck, 2003). The power within that binary is not so easily reversible because who has the power to be a viewer is deeply embedded within culture (Betterton, 1987). The reflexive questions that Beth asks of herself confirm the complications involved with looking, she debates the constructed and embedded gendered dynamic of viewer/viewed and resists the constructions of femininity that uphold such a power structure. As noted by Disch and Kane (1996), looking critically at men's bodies is a direct disruption of the power enmeshed within the traditional dynamic, and women run the risk of transgression of the feminine role. By asking the questions, Beth works from a place of her own gendered embodiment. This awareness of her position in her role as a woman who is an artist allows her the space to construct a feminist resistance not by simply attempting to reverse the flow of power with her male nudes, but to explore the subjectivity of gendered experiences in the work. Ultimately, this works to expose the constructions on which this binary is built, and this does further work in that it allows a reading of gender beyond the body.

The main way that Beth achieves this is through an explicit focus on sexuality. She uses the nude as a symbol of sexuality and in doing this question the very notion of the nude body as symbolic of the sexual:

> I think that how I treat the nude body is what resonates with people, like they see nude male and female bodies and they see that it can be just normal, or it can be sexual. it's interesting in this project that you can see maybe, ok men are looking in a sexual way at my body but in some of the pictures you don't see that, you see very emotional and human pictures and then the other way around it's the same, sometimes I look at the male body in a sexual way and sometimes it's not sexual at all

The investment in communicating the subjectivity of the body challenges the immediate sexualisation of the body. By focusing on representing the subjectivity of the relationship between the body and sexuality, Beth challenges the notion that the nude is an object of the gaze by representing embodiment rather than the corporeality of the body. In focusing on sexuality as an embodied experience by representing both the male and female nude, she continues the re-embodying move employed by feminist artists beginning in the 1990s (Betterton, 1996). This shift towards an embodied perspective is itself a reaction against the disembodied knowledges produced from modernist art practices and a continuation of feminist conversations surrounding essentialism.

Further, the incorporation of the male body destabilises binary knowledges because it calls into question the naturalisation of sexual difference, placing the nude male body in the same place as the nude female body, Beth's work outlines how the gendered body is constituted within social and political discourse, and gender is not a condition of the materiality of the body and so power can be negotiated. This contributes to a greater challenge to the gaze, as it destabilises the very notion that women's bodies are objects for consumption within a heterosexual framework by situating women as active producers of knowledge with a specific embodied perspective rather than passive recipients of a male gaze. When the body is conceptualised as being socially and politically mediated, then the binaries which constitute a gender hierarchy can be understood within the social and political conditions in which a binary rests. In this case, heterosexuality is at the core of these representations. As Beth demonstrates:

> Before this project maybe I was a bit afraid of the male body, and I was always thinking that men have this sexual energy, you know, like they always are looking at my body in a sexual way, but doing this project I realised it's not always like that but, yeah,

> people have sexual energy and, I think that women also like to look at men but we don't talk about it, like I like feeling that sexuality, so it's a complex relationship

These reflections on the process of this work exposes the ways that bodies are coded in gendered ways in order to maintain a hierarchy of power. The foundation of the gaze is grounded in heterosexual relations which maintain the notion that natural, biological sexual difference is static and inevitable. For women's bodies in visual culture, as society is ordered by sexual differentiation, this maps onto the pleasures garnered from looking. Mulvey (1975) argues that this binary gives legitimacy to the idea that men are active and women are passive, meaning that the authority of the gaze falls to men, and women passively receive the gaze. In the act of inscribing the female nude with agency and authority to look critically at the male nude, Beth breaks down the inevitability of the binary and ultimately produces a space whereby women too have access to a language of sexuality, where knowledges about sexuality are embodied and socially situated.

Sexuality as a subjective, embodied experience was also taken up as a topic of exploration for some of the other digital feminist artists. They too used representations of the body to examine and resist the ways in which the male gaze regulates sexuality in order to maintain a heterosexual binary. Representing the body as part of a sexual identity both contributes to the construction of a feminist visual language whilst also obscuring the concept of the gaze and resisting the underpinnings of that narrative. For example, Nina expressed how she represents sexuality in her work:

> The women are, they're powerful, the women are either nude or naked or playing with their bodies or playing with, like being sensual or sensual with other women or in scenes, scenes in which they are like scenes that feature powerful women who exude confidence with themselves and with their bodies so yeah, I think just exploring that sexuality and what it means and in what ways

This intentional representation of the nude body engaged with sexuality is another feminist tactic in which to obscure the heterosexual male gaze and assert women's subjectivity and embodiment into visual culture. Erotic art has a specific historical significance in relation to the gaze, with feminist scholars noting how gender power structures organise erotic art meaning that it cannot offer women a sense of sexual autonomy or liberation from heteronormativity (Eck, 2003). In turn this offers a cultural script for the audience whereby they can recognise the role of the passive female and male observer which reaffirms the

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authority of the gaze. Bauer (2019) explores this idea further and argues that when artists refuse these cultural scripts by denying male sexual pleasure in their representations, then they obscure the power in the concept of the gaze. Applying this idea, it is clear that Nina's representations of the female nude reject cultural scripts as they assert sexual agency and independence, rejecting a scrutinising male gaze. As such, her work does not provide further performance and maintenance of cultural scripts and therefore undermines the knowledges produced from traditional erotic art. Similarly to discussions in the previous section, Nina restructures and refocuses a feminist lens on sexuality and does further work of constructing a feminine subjectivity in art which can exist outside of heterosexuality.

6.3.2 Female gaze in digital space

This being said, although boundaries of sexuality and the gaze are obscured within the representation of the female nude, the digital context of the work that digital feminist artists in this sample inhabit can tighten the binaries. As such, online cultures are capable of regulating resistance not only with censorship of art, as explored in the previous chapter, but also with the social and political conditions in which digital technologies mediate knowledges of the gendered body. Online spaces develop different knowledges about the body and its representations and therefore gendered expectations and experiences are different in the online space to offline spaces, especially traditional art spaces. The objectification and sexualisation of women's bodies are mapped onto online spaces and Coyle (1996) described how computer culture itself is coded as male from advertisements to the language used. Women's bodies in online spaces are coded by their availability for consumption and the development of the internet has intensified this condition of the male gaze. This newer variant of the male gaze has prompted digital feminist artists in this research to resist and challenge this notion in their work. Sadie noted how:

> I mean I have one particular piece that's called the male gaze, it's kind of a humorous piece where it's just these headless torsos, like these headless female bodies that are nude and are posing for the camera, but I also want to portray, like I said before, the women are quite sexualised in a lot of my work but I want to show that there's depth to every character, you know, they're not just posing sexy for the men to look at

It is evident that Sadie is exploring ideas around representations of women's bodies in digital spaces. She specifically refers to posing as a condition of the male gaze and this is something that Laura Mulvey (2006) explored in her later work in which she revisits her original

contribution to feminist theory. A more thorough exploration of Mulvey's ideas are discussed in the literature review, but it is important to provide this overview as it directly relates to how the poses of women's bodies paired with a digital environment create further, newer forms of objectification. By her response to new technologies in relation to the gaze, Mulvey (2006) maintained the notion that posing is a critical element of the gaze and this has translated from film into any moving or still images which can be accessed online. The still images that are consumed in digital spaces mean that the bodies represented in them are fixed in time and space, and she argues that it is this stillness that essentially objectifies both male and female characters. This means that the images themselves become objects of the gaze, in that the image as an object and the bodies as objects within the image have the ability to be possessed. Whilst this is different to her earlier work in which she established that in film it is the movement of objects which define a clear masculine and feminine divide, with the movement of the camera facilitating the male gaze, she continues to argue that the desire for possession solidifies the authority of a male gaze with still images in digital spaces.

The notion of possession is based on the idea that in the same way that the camera possesses women's bodies as it moves around them voyeuristically, the image itself creates a desire to possess and control the representation. Where a film does not allow ownership and control because the images are moving, this creates an element of the male gaze which desires to own and control the object. The poses of the body, specifically women's bodies, are emblematic of the simultaneous rise in celebrity culture and digital technologies. Mulvey (2006) argues that the rise of celebrity culture has created the necessity of supplementing the traditional moving image in film with more still images which include items like posters and pinups as a way to enact the desired possession of the objects of the gaze. Further, she argues that posing is central to the desire constructed in the gaze, and the poses of the body in still images define what feminine sexuality means within cultural moments which constitute a visual language of sexuality as an object of the gaze, with specific posing of the body structuring these connotations. The consumption of these images is encouraged in online spaces, with the repeated access to objects of the gaze satisfying the need to possess.

Oliver (2017) reflects on Mulvey's thoughts and extends her theory into more contemporary internet uses, similar to the ways in which my sample of digital feminist artists experience the internet. She suggests that 'social media is fertile breeding ground for the male gaze and its symptomatic psychic delusions of possession and control' (Oliver, 2017, 453). Relating to celebrity culture, she argues that the internet has highlighted the accessibility of celebrity

bodies for consumption in the same way that it has made pornography available. The poses stemming from this digital culture have created a visual language in which we contribute to and engage in the male gaze. Oliver (2017) notes how women have adopted the poses in these images and represent their bodies in a way that is coded as culturally desirable. This posing plays into the design of social media itself, which she asserts is constructed out of the desire for possession central to the male gaze. Within this, the images that proliferate social media are continuously sexualised and objectified and this is elevated to more concerning imagery especially when considering the uses of social media in the harassment of young women with practices such as up skirting and sharing creepshots (see Harper, 2021; Thompson, 2018 for further discussion) becoming a factor of women's everyday experiences. In this way, the poses which identify sexuality within some online cultures are identifiable by being broken down into specific body parts, they are fractured and disembodied and always available for consumption. Ultimately Oliver (2017) concludes that these fragmented representations of women's body parts are emblematic of a pure male gaze in which a binary is enforced between active male and passive female, where possession and control of the body is only made more dangerous in online spaces.

Sadie's work, and much of the work discussed throughout this chapter, confronts this male gaze and all of its connotations by presenting the fragmented female nude within the spaces where objectification happens. The satirical use of the fractured, disembodied female nude communicates a knowingness of the workings of the male gaze and as such, destabilises the power in the binary which asserts the naturalness of the gendered roles within the male gaze. Offering posed fragmented bodies gives agency to women and reclaims the control in representations of their bodies being disembodied as part of their possession within online spaces. As such, the work of digital feminist artists in this sample bridges the gap between the political and social conditions of women's experiences and art worlds. This works to inscribe a specific feminist visual language into online spaces, as well as continuing a legacy of feminist politics by bringing feminist visual histories into contemporary political moments. As it relates more specifically to representations of the body, it is impossible to understand the practices of these digital feminist artists without understanding the visual culture in which they are situated and in doing so, it is evident that feminist resistance directly speaks to online cultures which perpetuate the objectification and sexualisation of women's bodies in visual representations.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which representation matters to my sample of digital feminist artists. Within this, I have outlined a brief history of representation specifically relating to the body throughout different waves of feminism. Second wave feminism is of notable importance to my sample, who draw on strategies of reclaiming the female nude from traditional images of the female nude within art worlds. In doing this, my sample of digital feminist artists construct a specific feminist visual language which produces knowledge about the body and sexuality from the standpoints of women, and this destabilises the sexualisation of the body stemming from the naturalisation of sexual difference. In constructing this visual language, these digital feminist artists again look to earlier feminism movements which employed postmodernist techniques to reframe and reconstruct the body, and this informs a debate of the possibilities of constructing a visual language which completely destabilises, or sits outside of, a patriarchal binary which structures gendered social life. Even so, a feminist visual language is evidenced to exist within the re-citing strategies used by my sample of digital feminist artists, calling on earlier feminist artists to construct intergenerational feminist conversations which speak with the contemporary situatedness of women's political and social lives. From here, the chapter moves on to explore the concept of a female gaze and how this is understood in the practices of digital feminist artists. One way that a female gaze is expressed is through representing the male nude, noting how in working reflexively with the male nude, digital feminist artists in this sample reconstruct and resist the male gaze and inject subjectivity into the dichotomy of looking and being looked at. Further, when thinking about the male gaze in the contemporary digital spaces which these digital feminist artists occupy, we see how the male gaze continues to persist. However, through a conscious engagement with the notion of the male gaze, digital feminist artists can use their work to make explicit the objectification which happens online, and destabilise power within the binary which upholds the notion of the passive female body and assertive male viewer.

Overall, these discussions have contributed to a wider notion of resistance in the experiences of digital feminist artists. This furthers the argument from the previous chapter which detailed how digital feminist artists in my sample use Instagram as a space of resistance in their practices. Adding to this, this chapter has outlined how resistance to the knowledges produced within art history and to the male gaze is central to the representations that they construct within the work that they display on Instagram, and this makes a strong link between digital feminist art and a broader feminist politics which is concerned with representing the body and sexuality.

The construction of a specific feminist visual language is relevant to this resistance as digital feminist artists work not only to counteract objectification of women's bodies, but also actively contribute to a feminist re-imagining of visual culture and the knowledges which it produces which are embodied in everyday life. The next chapter follows this, and zooms out further to encapsulate the differing levels of resistance that digital feminist artists involved in this research construct. In this, the next chapter will focus on the digital spaces which they occupy as part of their everyday lives as women and as artists. This will include a discussion of how digital feminist artists in this sample experience online spaces as sites of feminist struggle and how these feeds into broader feminist imaginings of digital space.

Chapter 7: Navigating digital spaces

7.1 Introduction

Space is another concept which proved to be important to the digital feminist artists involved in this project. As mentioned previously towards the end of chapter five, digital spaces are central to the experiences of digital feminist artists in this sample because they are the sites in which they either produce or exhibit their work. As such, digital feminist artists in this sample navigate with different digital spaces as part of their daily lives. Through discussing their experiences of using Instagram, which has been explored more thoroughly in chapter five, and the content of the work that they produce as demonstrated in chapter six, it became clear that the environments in which they inhabit as women and artists are crucial to their experiences and this is worthy of a deeper analysis.

Further, whilst the analysis stems from the data in a grounded theory approach (see chapter four for further detail), thinking about space is also part of a broader feminist politics. As Angel and Gibbs (2017) importantly note, feminist work is fundamentally crucial in thinking through how bodies are deployed, produced, and represented in digital economies because such a space asks similar questions to feminism itself. In this way, questions over materiality and bodies are inherently feminist; opening lines of inquiry into digital spaces prompts similar feminist discussions around shifting notions of gender and power. Again, it is the combination of the content of the work created by digital feminist artists paired with the spaces where the work is exhibited, that sketch a fuller picture of their experiences. As such, this chapter will move between discussing the work itself, the experience of inhabiting online spaces, and in what ways this matters to feminist thinking in a fluid way as these three components work in tandem.

In this chapter, I will explore the contradictory experiences of being a digital feminist artist, what this means for the work that they produce, and what this contributes to broader discussions of contemporary feminism. In order to do this, it is important to draw from cyberfeminists ideas because of their influence in bringing to light the gendered elements of the internet and wider technologies and their ideas surrounding how new digital spaces provide greater freedoms for women (see for example Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1996). Whilst in many ways this sentiment rings true for this sample, there are aspects of being a digital feminist artist which magnify and intensify feminist struggles because of the online spaces where they produce and exhibit their work.

In brief, cyberfeminism is often characterised through the lens of third wave feminism. A response to a growing revolution of information technologies and particularly the internet, cyberfeminists saw a utopian potential in cyberspace, claiming that the disembodied elements of online spaces allowed for the resolution of embodied inequalities. According to early cyberfeminist imagining (Plant, 1997), online spaces are spaces without the mediating effects of the material body, spaces where gender is a concept that can be fluid and changeable, and spaces where connectivity can happen for activist purposes. In this way, the internet acts as a playground for gender, where the body can be left behind to make way for experimentation with identity, and escape the boundaries produced by markers of the physical body. This disembodied space rests upon an abstract concept of disembodiment (see Turkle, 1997) which allows for universal space of interaction where solidarity and collective action can be achieved. Therefore, for many cyberfeminists, liberation exists within a disembodied cyberutopia.

This being said, not all feminist theorists have uncritically accepted this utopian cyberfeminist dream. The universalism that comes with an imagined disembodiment has the potential to be essentialising, and just as Sunden (2001) contends, in the spaces where the 'meat' is left behind to give rise to a disembodied consciousness, there is the possibility of reproducing essentialist patriarchal models. In cyberspace, a universal concept of Woman cannot accommodate the situatedness of different women and cannot account for the intersections that constitute women's identities. Moreover Nakamura (2002) argues that without the context of sociocultural locations, everyone in cyberspace is assumed to be representative of the dominant sex, class, race, ability and so on. This is what she calls default whiteness, a critique of cyberfeminism on the basis that the theoretical imaginings of a world without racism or sexism in cyberspace actually erases and denies race. Further, her critique importantly recognises that bodies still exist, and lived experiences including interactions with digital technologies, are mediated through embodiment.

An account of online space as a completely separate sphere of social life may reinforce the dualisms which exist in patriarchal constructions, and this does little for feminism. McGerty (2000) calls for a more nuanced and complex interrogation of the relationship between women and technology, noting how an appreciation for the deeply entwined spaces can be helpful in moving beyond dualistic thinking. Similarly, Brophy (2010) argues that critiquing cyberutopian fantasies can allow us to more fully incorporate an analysis of embodiment into the relationship between feminism and technology, but also urges that cyberfeminism remains a rich body of theory from which to theorise women's engagement with digital space. It is from

this position that the following chapter develops. Whilst a much more thorough and detailed outline of cyberfeminist ideas can be found in chapter two, the brief overview here serves to lay the foundation from which the following discussions arise. Although this project has adopted a grounded theory approach and so begins with the experiences of participants as the foundation of the knowledge constructed, lots of participants themselves worked from within this body of literature and we discussed in interviews our reflections on cyberfeminist ideas and online spaces more broadly. In laying this theoretical foundation here I aim to situate my participant's knowledges and experiences within a body of literature to which this analysis contributes.

 The complexities and the tensions within cyberfeminism and its critiques is mirrored in the participant's relationships with online spaces. The internet is simultaneously a liberatory space and a space of fear, where embodiment and situatedness is in a constant flux with the environment. Throughout this chapter, I will discuss how online spaces are viewed as both genderless and heavily gendered amongst the sample, and how embodiment matters to the experiences of participants. In this, the concept of the avatar is introduced and explored, and I suggest that there can be a liberatory possibility for digital feminist artists when engaging with digital spaces. However, the second section serves to highlight how inequalities are perpetuated in online spaces for digital feminist artists in this sample, and from this I develop the argument that online spaces replicate city spaces in the way that they reproduce binaries of oppression. Specifically focusing on queer women's experiences, and the relationship between women, space, and fear, it is possible to draw the conclusion that embodiment and the body are central to how digital feminist artists in this sample navigate online spaces. Whilst much of these discussions centre on the challenges that digital feminist artists face, there still exists ways in which they can and do practice feminist resistance in the digital spaces that they occupy.

7.2 Gendered online spaces

The notion that the internet is a gendered space was contested among the participants. Some participants understood the internet to be inherently female whilst others imagined the internet as a neutral space on which to create new identities. Though very different approaches, both of these sentiments support the idea that the internet provides multiple possibilities, especially for women, which may not be accessible in offline spaces. For example, Sadie outlined how:

> When it comes to artwork, I like that [the internet] is a space where you can create your own identity because I think it's kind of fun, there's the way you are perceived in real

life because you're bound to your physical body and you can't help but be judged by people even if someone is trying really hard not to make assumptions about you based on your physical body, but they will because that's how our society works, but with online space, you can express yourself and create an idea of yourself based on how you perceive yourself, and I think that's kind of interesting

Relating specifically to the production of her work using digital spaces, for Sadie the internet is a place that sits somewhere outside of gender as a notion bound to the physicality of the body. In this way, gender is not limited to the perception of the body as a signifier of identity. Instead, the internet offers multiple avenues for identity-building beyond the physical, and it is this idea that brings about a sense of freedom from the binaries which mediate both gender and the artwork of my sample of digital feminist artists.

The liberation of the internet for women is a central component of cyberfeminism, a term coined by the feminist activist artist collective VNS Matrix. Intentionally without clear definition, cyberfeminism refers broadly to the subversion of the androcentrism associated with new technologies through women engaging with the internet to empower themselves (Gajjala and Mamidipudi, 1999). This call for empowerment was fuelled by a potent sense of potential for a disembodied internet space which would liberate women from the confines of their bodies, highlighting the power in internet technologies for resisting regimes of gender. Part of this disembodiment for cyberfeminists is the notion of 'identity tourism' (Turkle, 1997). Turkle (1997) argued that repressive and oppressive boundaries can be loosened when we assume different identities in online spaces and this is particularly linked to the idea that racial and gendered oppression is heavily associated with embodied visibility. Therefore, the potential provided by online spaces to play with identity means that people have the space to resist their oppression brought about by their embodied identities. These ideas led Nakamura (2002, 8) to coin the term identity tourism, which refers directly to the practice of how members of one group 'try on for size the descriptors generally applied to persons of another race or gender'. What Sadie refers to is not necessarily identity tourism in that she is not suggesting that digital feminist artists swap their identities when navigating online spaces, but the concept is still relevant in how she points to the ability to create identities outside of the confines of materiality. Moreover, the suspension of visible, material markers of identity in online spaces challenges the ways in which identity itself is perceived, and Sadie points to this thinking in her own articulation of internet spaces in relation to identity.

Sadie links her sense of identity tourism and disembodiment to self-expression and this can also be seen in Nouraie-Simone's (2005) experiences of using the internet. For Nouraie-Simone, the internet is not simply a subversive space because it offers the chance to try on different identities, but instead it offers us the tools and the space to escape embodiment completely and design our own chosen identities. Similarly to Sadie, as outlined in the above passage, liberation from the gendered body can be found in the complete absence of physicality when using online spaces. Ultimately for cyberfeminists, disembodiment was a utopian dream in which the physical markers of gender or race or sexuality could be eroded completely and rendered irrelevant in the pursuit of resisting oppression and the construction of new feminist identities.

This being said, Daniels (2009) makes the persuasive case that women use online spaces to navigate their material, physical experiences in multiple complex ways that simultaneously reinforce and resist hierarchies and binaries. In this, she urges that corporeal embodiment is the grounding force through which women interact with internet technologies, and that the impact the internet has on the lives of women is experienced through embodiment. Further, she draws attention to an inherent contradiction within cyberfeminism, whereby the theoretical allure of disembodiment is at odds with the primary notion that digital technologies can empower women who are recognised and oppressed by their gendered embodiment. Gendered oppression is mediated through embodiment and so disembodiment would not necessarily resist the foundations of oppression but simply eradicate the body completely. Disembodiment can only be experienced in textual, theoretical conditions, and Hansen (2006) illuminates the importance of the images, photographs, and video that decorate our digital worlds. As noted in the previous analysis chapter, representing the body was a primary focus of the digital feminist artists in this sample, and they use photography and digital videos to create their representations and weave the body into digital spaces. This idea will be explored in more depth later in this chapter, but at present it highlights the importance of the material body and how it is central to the construction of feminist digital art. The visual elements of our online experiences mean that the body is not simply a textual idea that can be discarded when participating in cyberspace, but it is an active and fleshy representation of our embodied experiences both on and offline.

Although many of the digital feminist artists involved in this project critiqued the idea of disembodiment, and this will be further explored within this section, it is important to note how the utopian dream of disembodiment from cyberfeminist origins remains a central part of their feminist politics and informs their visions of the future. Similarly to how representing the

female nude formed part of a nostalgic feminist history, the dream of disembodiment for my participants follows a feminist theoretical trajectory and forms the basis of how the interactions between art, the body, and internet spaces can be known both now, and in their imaginings of futures of feminist thinking. To exemplify this point, Nicola imagines how:

> If I could just be like a floating brain, I would. I do think that we are all going to have some sort of like glasses or spectacles or contacts that are going to make… you know, using devices a lot easier and hopefully it will be less of a situation where we are hunched over at our computers and more of a situation where were just kind of like typing in the air or voice communicating or whatever, and being able to walk around and like do what we need to do, rather than, and just like seeing it through these spectacles or lenses rather than like having to hold a phone

Disembodiment features heavily in Nicola's vision of the future of the internet as she takes on the utopian ideas of leaving the body behind when engaging in online spaces. Whilst during our interview, this is something that we both laughed about, the sentiments draw clear links between her own experiences and ideas for a digital future and cyberfeminist ideas. Interestingly, Nicola outlines her wish for a separation of mind and body, suggesting that internet technologies could offer the potential for this dualism in the future in a way that her mind could occupy her digital spaces whilst her body would navigate the physical realm.

The disembodiment that features here can be seen in the utopian viewpoint of early cyberfeminism, and these debates proliferate the contradictions within cyberfeminist ideas. Whilst the idea of liberation lies in the abstraction of mind from the body by eradicating visual markers of difference in order to construct a utopian space as ground for unbiased communication, this same concept of abstraction falls neatly into essentialising constructs of gender and sexuality which limit the scope for feminist resistance. Because this disembodied space takes away the situatedness of different perspectives and removes markers of difference, women become Woman. This notion of Woman evokes a sense of universalism which assumes that all women are defined by the same markers of identity.

The symbolic notion of Woman is in itself a space where culture is played out, as well the essentialist understanding of woman being so closely related to the divide between public and private spaces (Rosewarne, 2007). From this it is possible to note how the liberating potential of disembodiment is actually a call back to the essentialising qualities of patriarchal thinking. As Sunden (2001, 216) eloquently articulates, 'where "the meat" is left behind and the

disembodied consciousness released from its earthly groundings, the Cartesian separation of mind from body is no longer a contradiction, a divide under threat, but re-articulated and fortified'. As such, the idea of abstracting the mind from the body is in and of itself a masculinist perspective which reproduces a patriarchal model of digital space. Moreover, this dualistic split paves the way for further dualisms which cyberfeminism sought to fix through disembodiment, such as organism/machine, culture/nature, and public/private. By re-articulating patriarchal narratives of enlightenment, the liberatory qualities of disembodied online spaces have little to offer feminisms which seek to emphasise situated, partial, and embodied knowledges. Instead, a cyberutopia focused on disembodiment can, perhaps accidentally, continue building the binaries which contribute to oppression.

The dream of disembodiment was never realised in the sense that feminist theorists have noted how the body is always relevant in that it mediates our very engagement with the internet as a space to inhabit (see for example Pitts, 2004; Kendall, 2002; Daniels, 2009). As discussed, the notion of disembodiment itself is not necessarily useful to feminism, as it implies a separation of mind and body which perpetuates binary thinking surrounding the body as well as promoting a masculinised ideal whereby the production of knowledge is rational and objective, outside of the body. As Hinsey (2013, 27) importantly asserts, 'disembodiment involves a loss of perspective, rendering our voices tinny and hollow without the resonance provided by our hips and thighs'. With this, Hinsey (2013) is referring to cyberfeminism's position that women are limited by their bodies, and how this does not accurately correlate to more contemporary associations between feminism and the body in which women's bodies are celebrated as sources of knowledge and power. Discourses are written and read on the body whilst simultaneously being written by experiences of the body, so a disembodied internet could only serve to create further boundaries between cyberspaces and physical spaces which limits the resistance accessible to women online. This is of particular importance to my sample of digital feminist artists because a lot of their work, as previously discussed in both analysis chapters has shown, is born from very personal and embodied gendered experiences. Therefore, for some of the digital feminist artists, the internet is conceptualised as a gendered space which is emblematic of an *embodied* experience.

Returning to Nicola, although her cyberfeminist ideals of disembodiment do have a place in her worldview, she currently navigates her way through digital spaces as an embodied, feminine person and this offers the potential for resistance to patriarchal binaries. For example, she explained that:

Some people see it [the internet] as genderless, some people see it as male some people see it as female, for me I would say female just because of the way I interact online and the way I perceive myself, and I think that the internet is very self-reflexive, so for me I identify as a female and I view the internet as female as well

The reflexive aspect of the internet spaces that she navigates are important to Nicola because they allow an exploration of the gendered, embodied self. She also aligns her own identity as female with the internet as female. We can draw parallels between this idea and Sadie Plant's (1997) cyberfeminist text, *Zeros + Ones*, in which she points to a subversive intimacy between women and technology whereby she argues that women have always been the machine parts embedded in a male culture through both material reproduction as well as reproducing communications. She illustrates this argument further by arguing that women have been the vessel of communication between human (man) and machine, as women have performed the actual work of computing from being typists to telecommunicators among other roles rendered invisible in narratives of progressive machines. In this way she suggests a symbiosis between women and machines where together an alliance is formed.

There is an inherent sexuality to Plant's articulations of this relationship as she eroticises the melding of women's bodies with digital technologies, highlighting how the two are very much imbued with feminine desire and sexuality. The non-hierarchical and nonlinear elements of online space, as well as the nurturing connections made within online communities are all associated to be feminine values according to Plant as she urges that these feminine values act as a marker of difference to a traditional male order. As such, the internet can be understood as inherently female because of essential feminine qualities that are united with the machine to mark female otherness in a way that opposes patriarchal social order through destabilising boundaries between human/machine which are perpetuated with the male/female dichotomy.

Whilst we can criticise the essentialist qualities of Plant's work, it is still useful to this project in thinking through how digital feminist artists in this sample consider their relationship with the internet to be a reflexive and embodied one. Further, Plant's (1997) work is useful in that it helps to articulate the resistive and subversive potential of digital feminist artists not only through their work, as we have seen in previous chapters, but also through their conscious engagement with the internet as an embodied space. Through the lens of Plant's theory, Nicola uses her embodied femininity to move effortlessly and fluently between the two separate spaces of online and offline, of body and machine. Moreover, through this reflexive space in which

she exists, Nicola is able to fuse together these dichotomies which in turn destabilises the boundaries which construct spaces as distinct from each other and forms the basis of how gender itself is understood as an ontological space.

Although this argument allows us to further understand how feminist resistive practices are embedded into the experiences of digital feminist artists, it is still necessary to consider how seeing this relationship between the body and the internet as something essentially feminine can actually be harmful to contemporary feminist arguments which guide the epistemology of this project. Sunden (2001) points to how the otherness that Plant situates through the internet as inherently feminine is rooted in essentialist thinking with the reliance on a feminine essence. This feminine essence is attributed to naturally occurring characteristics stemming from and existing within the biological notion of the female body. Furthering her critique, Sunden (2001) points towards the risk of leaning to essentialism in considering the possibilities of cyberspaces for feminism, arguing that when men and women are positioned as intrinsically different to each other in either a biological or ontological way, then there is no space for difference(s) between women in cyberspace. To elaborate, if the body functions as the sole marker of natural difference between men and women, then the individual, complex, intricate, and different realities between women are ignored. This serves to perpetuate the underlying patriarchal constructions of gender and does little to eradicate the genderless, masculinised perspective of cyberspaces.

Ultimately, Sunden (2001) is problematising the theoretical underpinnings of Plant's (1997) ideas, and while she champions the radical spirit in which Plant pivots the narrative of cyberspace being a genderless domain, her concern is valid in that she doesn't see how Plant takes into consideration women's everyday experiences with the internet. Whilst this critique rightly calls for an anti-essentialist approach to understanding women's relationship to the internet, we can still see how Plant's ideas are relevant to analysing Nicola's approach. Where Nicola's viewpoint on the gendered space of the internet does stem from her embodiment as a woman, this is not to say that she considers her lived, embodied experiences to be inherently biological or essential. Rather, she actively embeds a socially constructed femininity into the spaces that she constructs online, using her reflexive approach to build spaces of resistance which are imbued with femininity as a way of counteracting the patriarchal regulation that polices online spaces. A lot of the digital feminist artists involved in this project resonated with this approach, using their work and their presence of women who are artists to destabilise the masculinised online spaces that they experience as feminist artists. In this, and as has been

throughout cyberfeminist imaginings, the boundary between online and offline spaces is of particular importance to them.

Nicola discussed some of her work which explores this very discussion of the boundaries that are constructed between online and offline spaces. It is from here that I suggest that digital feminist artists in this sample, while perhaps not consciously working with cyberfeminism in mind, work to destabilise the binaries inherent to online space through producing work which articulates their embodied experiences. This takes on cyberfeminist ideas, but pushes them further by assessing how the lived, material body does not need to be ignored, but that different embodied experiences are much more fluctuating and can be experienced in online spaces. Not only does this work to destabilise the binaries around online and offline space, but this also rejects the notion that gender is inherent to the material body. Nicola described how:

> So I have one piece which is an actual image of me taken with a camera and then I have, it's like half of that and then the other half of the piece is my digital avatar its blended into a single image where it looks pretty uncanny like a lot of people think it's just an avatar and they think it's just the picture but its half and half so for me that's kind of the exploration of like, you know, being a person that feels both digital and actual

The avatar in Nicola's work serves to highlight how the embodied self can access and navigate digital spaces and disrupts the binaries which distinguish between online and offline space, and machine and organism. As a concept, the avatar is in itself an act of resistance according to Donna Haraway (1991) because it fits into her notion of the cyborg. The concept of cyborg feminism has been introduced and explored in the literature review, and I call on it here to investigate the role of the avatar in constructing feminine spaces online in the work of digital feminist artists in this sample, in the hope of curating feminist resistance to the patriarchally defined spaces where digital feminist art(ists) exists.

Broadly, to borrow from Haraway's (1991; 149) definition, the cyborg is 'a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction'. This definition refers to a rejection of the dualisms inherent to social realities which situate the experiences of our bodies. The figure of the cyborg, and the cyborg world that is imagined can deconstruct dualistic boundaries, acting as both feminist rebellion and liberation. In this way according to Haraway (1991), women have the capacity to imagine beyond their biological materiality and redefine what it means to be a woman distinct from the boundaries established by histories and cultures built on patriarchal essentialism. Nicola's avatar is the

blurring of these boundaries, as she is constructed as a hybrid of woman and computer and online and offline spaces. In her work, Nicola uses her avatar to express the fluidity of her identity as she extends her sense of personhood to move between digital and actual spaces. This illustrates how cyberfeminist ideas, including cyborg feminism, can shape and redefine gender as it relates to the body, and how this is incorporated into digital feminist art. Where Nicola imports her avatar so seamlessly into her work, the blurring of the boundaries between spaces becomes apparent in that the avatar is not visually distinct from the physical body in the image. As such, Nicola's physical body can be understood as both virtual and actual in that she embodies the space as both physical and virtual. In this sense, the use of the avatar in her work is very reminiscent of Haraway's cyborg which is both machine and organism, reality as well as fiction. Further, this destabilises the binaries constructed around spaces and around gender, giving way to a more multiple, unstable, and flexible approach to gender and embodiment. Digital feminist art in this way can be understood as a resistive practice in that it consciously deconstructs dualisms grounded in patriarchy by embedding a fluidity of the body into digital spaces.

Whilst this offers a sense of liberation for women as the biological basis of the body can be shifted and altered using the avatar, the materiality of the physical body cannot be ignored and still plays a role in how digital feminist artists in my sample understand their embodiment. For example, Nicola continued to discuss her relationship with her avatar:

> I think for me, my avatar is, I would say that it is an extension of myself for sure, I don't view it as a person or as myself completely because I could do things with my avatar that I would never do in real life, like I could easily stab my avatar with a knife and be totally fine and obviously I'm not going to do that in real life, so I think it's more like a digital portrayal of what I think and feel I guess, rather than my actual self as an identity in real life

From this, we can see that the body in a physical sense remains central to how we navigate through the world across physical as well as virtual spaces. There are differences between what material and virtual bodies can do, and this strengthens the binaries which exist between the two spaces. As such the avatar, although blurring boundaries and deconstructing dualisms, may not be able to offer the truly liberating experience that cyberfeminism advocates for. This is the basis for arguments which question the cyborg, and these critiques do play a role in how feminist art can be experienced in digital spaces.

A major criticism of cyberfeminist thinking, and the cyborg more specifically, is that it doesn't take into account the privilege of whiteness especially for women. Because the notion of the cyborg is so overtly inspired by 'women of colour' as a marginal, intersectional, and politically constructed identity, it denies the responsibility of dismantling whiteness and white feminist's social location. As Schueller (2005) importantly notes, this helps whiteness retain its privilege by remaining uninterrogated. Haraway (1991) draws from writings of women of colour in her seminal text, because for her they signify exactly what the cyborg identity is: syntheses of marginalised identities fused together to productively blur boundaries. She sees women of colour as emblematic of cyborg feminism because women of colour, as a social definition, provides a way of constructing political unity based on affinity rather than essence. This is a postmodern idea which is grounded in otherness and difference, rather than a unity based on essential sameness. As such, women of colour provide Haraway's cyborg with the subversive potential that it has become championed for. Whilst this departure from essentialism allows feminism as a solidarity based on difference to theoretically transcend into digital spaces and destabilise binaries, the makings of this theory lie in the oppressed material bodies of women of colour, whose experiences of oppression are not necessarily changed because of cyberfeminism. This critique is relevant to this current discussion because it highlights how materiality is so centrally linked to feminist theory as a political framework, and how the tensions between the physical and virtual need to be explored. It has also helped to understand how it is important to consider the experiences of difference as well as seeking to consistently blur boundaries. In this way, it is impossible not to notice the absence of discussions of whiteness in this section of the chapter when I focus so clearly on embodiment and identity.

In her take on the myth of the cyborg, Wilkerson (1997) outlines how although the theory of the cyborg offers hope and liberation for a subversive politics, it actually evades the issues of race and sexuality that it is addressing. She urges the need for white feminists particularly to undertake critical reflections of our own race and sexuality in order to achieve a subversive feminist future in digital spaces. All of the women involved in this project identify as white women, and as a white researcher myself, perhaps our whiteness mean that we could discuss the liberatory potential of digital spaces without considering the effect this has on bodies that are marked as different to ours by race. As such, the evasion of discussing race as a material, physical experience means that we unconsciously reconstructed hierarchies of privilege between women. This is because in constructing spaces of resistance online, we ignore the localised knowledges from which these ideas are embodied. So, when we consider race to be

part of the concept of women in cyberfeminist terms, that being a unity based on affinity rather than essence, we gloss over the fact that other markers of the body such as gender or sexuality are often not visible markers on the body in the same way that race is. As Schueller (2005) states, the analogical relationships that make up the political notion of gender often function to supress specific differences introduced by race, privileging whiteness. Whilst this project cannot lay claims to the experiences of digital feminist artists who are not white due to the sample, it is integral that a reflexive account of these silences is part of this narrative. This also highlights some of the tensions that the participants felt in thinking about the divide between physical and digital spaces.

This being said, sexuality is a localised, embodied identity in which some of the digital feminist artists in my sample drew from to form their online identities as well as their artwork. Thinking back to ideas from Sadie Plant (1996) as well as Haraway (1991), in both of their cyberfeminist imaginings it is the sense of sexuality, of melting together woman and machine, and forging an alliance between women and technology which offers greater freedom of expression. In this sense, it is less about plotting the physical sexual practices into virtual spaces and extending how sexuality can be known, but rather allowing the ambiguous embodiment of sexuality to exist across spaces which have been built to be contained and structured in heteropatriarchal terms. Where technology and digital spaces were constructed from a patriarchal ideal, digital feminist artists in this sample are critically exploring sexuality from their local embodied positions in the physical world, and using their digital work in digital spaces to challenge normative sexual identities. In this sense, technological spaces bare a stark similarity to art spaces whereby they are both governed by patriarchal ideology at the exclusion of women's narratives. By existing online as artists, and by exhibiting their work in digital spaces, digital feminist artists in my sample are curating embodied spaces online which weave women's narratives with the technology that hosts their work.

This is particularly interesting when considering how some of the digital feminist artists involved in this project discussed how their personal, subjective, and embodied experiences of sexuality informed their work. Here, I suggest that the weaving of a reflexive and feminine style of their artwork with the digital space in which the work exists becomes a glitch in the system (see Russell, 2020), challenging the boundaries of both the physical body as well as digital spaces. In discussing another piece of her work, Nicola described how:

> My work is very emotive based on feelings of like, my own sexuality, and of a lot of my work is sexual and just feelings of intimacy of love of betrayal, you know, a lot of things based on like, intimacy and intimate relationships whereas I feel like a lot of male identifying people, their work is more like, less like intimate and more like I said, like combative or, or objective in a way

Nicola positions her digital work as reflexive and emotive, based on her own embodied notions of sexuality. In this way, her avatar is less about bringing the body as a fleshy, material being into digital spaces, and more about injecting those digital spaces with a subjective and ambiguous sexuality generated from her specific situated experiences. It is not necessarily that the body of the avatar itself is a destabilising force, but it is the ways in which the avatar can convey gendered embodied sexuality without being tied to the materiality of the body which deconstructs the legitimacy of the naturalisation of gender. The incorporation of queer themes is also present in Nicola's work, as we have seen in previous chapters, and the way that she uses her avatar to convey a sense of desire beyond the biology of the body contributes to how she destabilises binaries. The fluidity in which sexuality is expressed across Nicola's work also plays a part in this deconstruction, because it mocks the binary lines of attraction and desire which are attributed to gender.

The notion of a glitch stems from Legacy Russell's (2020) feminist manifesto which revisits cyberfeminism's history to explore the contemporary intersections of women's identities in relation to technologies. A glitch, as she coins, is a form of refusal and non-performance. What she means by this is that a glitch aims to make abstract what has been forced into an uncomfortable materiality: the body. This refusal of the binary body and binary ways of knowing are enacted through the internet, where 'this calculated failure prompts the violent socio-cultural machine to hiccup, sign, shudder, buffer. We want a new framework and for this framework, we want new skin. The digital world provides a potential space where this can play out' (Russell, 2020, 11). Injecting the subjective and intersecting identities which are beyond the binary of the body is what gives glitch feminism its political feminist potential. It is a celebration of the slipperiness and fluidity of gender and the body, and this can be seen in the practices of the digital feminist artists involved in this project.

Thinking back to how Nicola uses her emotional reflections on sexuality and intimacy for her work, we can understand this as a glitch. This is because her work injects subjectivity into online spaces through the avatar. As an avatar is the digital embodiment of a binary between

human and machine, the subjective experiences which characterise the work extends the boundaries of embodiment to beyond the skin and into the machine. This glitch serves as a reminder that the concept of the machine is fallible and gender is not necessarily bound to the body in a binary way. This means that both gender and the body are rendered in abstract terms because reflections on embodied experience exist in Nicola's work without corporeality as we know it in binary terms. In this way, the notion of glitch feminism is helpful in that it offers a way of thinking about how subjectivity can interrupt binaries between human and machine to detangle gender and materiality. It is this error of the fixity of the body that is the glitch, and online spaces offer this type of error to happen and to be made visible. Further, this points to how rejection of normativity and resistance to binaries happen for digital feminist artists, meaning that digital spaces can be sources of liberation from patriarchal ways of knowing.

From this, we can see how thinking about cyberfeminist ideas, particularly the cyborg, in relation to the experiences of digital feminist artists in this sample, is helpful in understanding how digital spaces allow gender to be redefined through the exploration of the fluidity of the body, gender, and sexuality. In establishing a fluxing way that gender and sexuality can be experienced beyond the skin of the physical body, we see how patriarchal boundaries are examined and detangled, meaning that the ways in which digital feminist artists in this sample interact with and navigate through the internet can be considered feminist resistance. This is because through toying with ideas of gender and the body, digital feminist artists deconstruct and recreate knowledges surrounding gender and binary ways of knowing about the body. These new and emerging feminist imaginings are made possible through the spaces that the internet creates, and the next section of this chapter will explore in greater detail how digital spaces matter to this sample of digital feminist artists. In doing this, the tensions between physical and virtual spaces are acknowledged and a range of complex ways in which digital feminist artists navigate these spaces are highlighted. The body and embodiment are also further explored to understand how the internet as a space for exploration and liberation can be challenged from spatial perspectives.

7.3 Digital spaces and public spaces

Whilst the previous section outlined how the space of the internet can have liberating potential for digital feminist artists in this sample, and related this to ideas of embodiment and cyberfeminism, many of the participants involved discussed ways in which the online spaces that they navigate feel unsafe. Interestingly, these elements of fear and safety cut across the physical and digital divide, and their geographical location was often important to how they

perceived their identities online. As such, I argue in this section that online spaces, specifically social media such as Instagram, mirror city spaces in their architecture and design in order to regulate women's voices and reinforce binary ways of knowing. In this sense, this section highlights the ways in which the body is central to how this sample of digital feminist artists experience digital spaces, because it is through their embodied identities that they can cross over between physical and virtual spaces.

As already explored in previous chapters, the main platform which is used by the participants to exhibit their work is Instagram, and I have discussed how regulation happens in that particular space through censorship practices as well as comments from other internet users. Whilst the participants acknowledge these challenges as specific to digital spaces, in that negative comments from other Instagram users are specific to the platform and don't necessarily happen in physical spaces, the threats of violence that they receive because of their work being exhibited on Instagram are experienced in a physical, embodied way. For example, Emma described the negative comments that come from strangers accessing her profile, and how these comments contribute to some of her anxieties both on and offline. It is worth outlining Emma's experience at length because the context of her fears around safety contribute to the barriers through which she experiences the internet as a woman:

> I want all kinds of people to follow me but then maybe not all types of people because any time I post anything, let's say… queer related, I get a lot of negativity but always like, in a private message, it's almost like people just go to private messages to tell me some stuff like I shouldn't be promoting that or things like this, and I'm always wondering where they are coming from, it's almost like someone is reposting it somewhere else because none of them are following me, I checked many times, none of these people are following me, so I almost feel like someone is reposting it somewhere to tell people like, hey look at this person, she's drawing something very inappropriate lets go and do something bad to her

The ways in which the online space, here Instagram, is used and experienced on this everyday level is vastly different to the notion of a liberating cyberspace that cyberfeminists advocated for, and that was explored in the first section of this chapter. Instead, cyberspace may not be inherently revolutionary as a space away from the boundaries which govern everyday life in physical spaces, but rather the pockets of cyberspaces that digital feminist artists work from and within can be understood as continuing the deeply entrenched power relations of everyday

life. In this way, there is no real distinction between digital and non-digital spaces in that 'digital spaces are discursive and material, produced as an entanglement of physical and immaterial objects and ideas, practices and things' (Mclean, Maalsen, & Prebble, 2019, 741).

Digital spaces are always hybrid and multiple, and always constitute human-technology relationships (Leszcynski, 2015). In considering Emma's experience in relation to the space in which it occurs, we can see how gender relations and heteronormativity are embedded within these online spaces which are produced and mediated through negotiations of the boundaries of gender, in this case through those negative comments. This negotiation between resistance and regulation which happen on and through the online space moves between online and offline fluidly and can result in fear in offline space. Emma continues:

> I have this thing where I start to get paranoid that people somehow can come and actually do something to me, I know that it's probably not the case, and I do try and keep private information to myself, but every time someone is sending me some messages like that, I am feeling so unsafe and that, yeah, it's really difficult to feel safe to be honest

Because of the work that she exhibits on Instagram, Emma receives comments which aim to police her work, and ultimately her feminist politics. Whilst these interactions happen on the digital platform and are contained within than virtual space, the fear over safety from these virtual comments are felt in a physical, embodied way. Similarly, Kern (2020) outlines the relationship between city spaces and women's experiences. She explores how the city as an urban landscape has historically constituted a space of freedom for women in many ways; there are opportunities for work, opportunities for the exploration of identities, opportunities for political and social activisms, and opportunity to participate more fully in arts and culture. Cyberfeminist ideas heralded digital spaces as being liberating for these very reasons too and this chapter has so far demonstrated how these opportunities exist for digital feminist artists within the digital worlds that they navigate. However, Kern (2020) establishes that cities are also characterised by the non-tangible social traits of anonymity, unpredictability, and danger and argues that these elements of public space shape women's lives. She goes on to discuss how city spaces are landscapes of fear for women, noting how although women are statistically less likely to experience violence in public spaces than men, women are socialised to fear public spaces. The fear of strangers plays a large role in this, which leads to exploring the gendered power relations which mediate public and private spaces.

Where Emma explains how the anonymous messages that she receives online make her feel fearful in her offline life, it is possible to draw a comparison between how cities and online spaces operate. The spatial qualities of both cities and online spaces generate the same embodied notion of fear for women, and this idea is tied to the dualistic understanding of private/public spaces (Kern, 2010, 2020). City streets are often characterised as public spaces which are defined as masculine, male spaces and women are often tied to the domestic notions of the private sphere, made up largely of the home (see for example Spain, 2014; Schwartz, 1976; Saegert, 1980 for more detailed discussion). This socially constructed distinction creates a mechanism of social control which is played out spatially. For women, the fear of strangers is related to our understanding of public spaces as the domain of men and this fear is often imbued with connotations of what constitutes 'dangerous men', and this stems from the basis of age, ethnicity, and class. Ultimately public city spaces are the domain of men at the exclusion of women, and the design and regulation of such spaces serve to remind women that they do not belong in certain public spaces (Koskela, 1999).

Fearing strangers stems from the fear of sexual assault or harassment. Street harassment is an everyday experience for many women and this acts as a way of maintaining the divide between public and private spaces by continuously objectifying and sexualising women's bodies in public spaces. As such, women's fears are directed away from the home and the private sphere, and into more public city spaces and this reinforces patriarchal institutions such as the nuclear family and heterosexuality as places of safety. Doing this also reaffirms the dualisms that underly the naturalisation of sexual difference. In this way, the comments that Emma receives are from strangers policing her visibility as a woman in online space in order to establish a clear boundary in relation to the space. As these comments come from strangers, this evokes the same sense of fear that public city spaces do, as the fear of strangers, for women, equates to the fear of being attacked. Valentine (1990) suggests that in public city spaces, women feel a threat from all men who are strangers because they represent the possibility of sexual assault, and it is this fear that perpetuates patriarchal dominance over public spaces. When Emma is fearful that someone will do something to her, this mirrors the ways that women embody fear in public spaces more broadly. As such, the negative comments that digital feminist artists in this sample received from strangers online can be understood to be felt in the same way as harassment because the same imbalance of power exists across digital public spaces as well as offline public spaces. In this way, we can see how the materiality of the body cannot be ignored

completely in digital spaces because it has an impact on the embodied ways in which women experience the space.

Moreover, Emma's fear stems from her identity as a queer woman who exhibits visibly queer related artwork online. This is an experience that was shared between some of the other digital feminist artists, and the sense of fear was heightened because of their identities as queer women. For example, Nicola explained what happened when she posted a piece of her work to her Instagram which focused on queer subcultural sexuality and received a lot of negative reactions:

> The one guy who told me to throw away my computer out the window, he like, tried to follow my girlfriend on Instagram after that and it was just very creepy, very scary and very stressful like this person also lives in New York so, and I'm like, oh my god I hope he doesn't try to attack me or stalk me and it was all weird and creepy

The organisation of space functions to naturalise heterosexuality to maintain a patriarchal social order which sets upholds clear boundaries between public and private spaces (Nast, 1998). Every day public spaces have been described as aggressively heterosexual because of the proliferation of images of heterosexual couples that we encounter in public spaces (Namaste, 1996). Further, sexualised imagery of women's bodies is so prevalent in public city spaces and this contributes to the naturalisation of heterosexuality, as non-heterosexual identities are not awarded space or representation, rendering them invisible and unworthy. Similarly to physical public spaces, Van Zoonen (2002) argues that the internet was conceived as a heterosexual space itself. Born from military organisations, the internet still is arguably maintained as a heteronormative, masculine space. Through hearing of both Emma and Nicola's experiences of posting queer art to their Instagram pages, we see how they both get similar responses even though they are located in different parts of the world, and have different audiences. The internet then acts as an extension of physical public spaces, and the embodiment of fear is present through online interactions, so it is impossible to ignore the body when considering its relationship to digital space, because it is through the body that we experience social and cultural life, and it is from this position that we engage with spaces. Therefore, the policing of the online spaces where digital feminist art is exhibited mirrors the ways in which women, in this case queer women in particular, are controlled in public physical spaces in order to maintain boundaries and naturalise heterosexuality.

Whilst a lot of literature highlights how the internet can be an empowering space for community building among queer people, and how online spaces are highly fluid environments with opportunities to try on different identities (Turkle, 1997), these accounts do not consider the negotiations of power that happen within those spaces and the impact this has in an offline setting. Both Emma and Nicola's fears are related to their safety in their geographical locations, so their embodied feeling of fear moves with them between digital and physical space. This sense of fear, although experienced by lots of women in different contexts, is specific to their identities as queer women in this case. Fear is a commonplace experience for queer women in relation to public spaces because in public spaces they are only visible through a heteronormative male gaze. When perceived as a queer woman in public space through embodied gender identities or relational actions between women, Valentine (1993) argues that there is a risk of aggression and violence. Rodo-de-Zarate (2015) furthers this argument and suggests that it is not just the violence or aggression suffered that is the problem, but it is the constant fear over what will happen which constitutes queer women's relationship with public spaces.

Emma and Nicola's fear is not at all unfounded, and we can see how they cross over between physical and digital spaces with the same embodied notions of what it means to be a queer woman. It is the intersection of gender and sexuality which mediate their navigations of digital spaces and so in this way, their engagement with the internet as queer women is more complex than having a space in which to perform multiple identities fluidly. Through their work as artists, their identities are in a state of constant negotiation with the space that they are in. The work that they post to their Instagram accounts focuses on queer themes and this is a way of making queer women visible, and with this comes the possibility for risks of aggression, violence, and fear. Advertising is used to uphold a global boys club whereby images of women's bodies are often sexualised and objectified in order to reaffirm the boundaries of public space as markedly heteronormative (Rosewarne, 2007). These boundaries promote a dualism between consumer and object and men and women, and this serves to neutralise heterosexuality and exclude other identities. If we consider how Instagram is a public space, we can see how the images that digital feminist artists in this sample produce can challenge that constructed heteronormativity by resisting the dominant imagery which proliferates public online spaces. The negative comments that are received are a way of policing the space as a way to reinforce heteronormative boundaries which benefit a patriarchal social order. Moreover, these comments serve to generate fear which is used to control women's identities

and movements in public spaces. Therefore, we can see how online spaces such as Instagram are designed in a similar way to public spaces in cities which invoke fear in queer women in order to regulate their behaviour and promote heteronormativity. In this sense, we also see that online spaces are not places where the body and its knowledges can be left behind, rather the body is the only way in which we can experience online space because it is through our embodied knowledges that we navigate and respond to interactions in those spaces.

However, although the experiences of receiving negative comments which makes them feel unsafe in their local spaces are bound to systems of oppression, digital feminist artists in this sample continue to resist this regulation. Instead, they spoke about ways in which they continue to post work onto their Instagram to really challenge the borders of sexuality marked out by heteronormativity. For example, Nicola, in continuing explaining her experiences of receiving negative comments on her artwork which explored queer sexuality, discussed how:

> So I get a little upset again but then I just start to feel more empowered like oh my god these men are just so uncomfortable with seeing a female portray female sexuality in their own way and in a subtle way, it freaked them out, and it's so weird and psychological that they must feel like they don't have control over the reaction that a female is having like I'm sure if I did a completely oversexualised version of this it would be received differently you know because that's what you see a lot but yeah, I mean, it was just really freaking people out and I think they're just very unfamiliar with these ideas

From a spatial perspective, it is possible to see the internet as an extension of the social and political landscapes of cities because of the ways in which queer spaces are negotiated. Urban landscapes and cityscapes have been a particular feature in the theorisation of queer spaces and identities. Whilst specific areas of cities are marked out as queer territories, queer women are often rendered invisible within those spaces, meaning that they lack the spatial territories which contribute to identity building.

This being said, Gieseking (2014) argues that queer women have the opportunities to cross over the borders that define their identities, which include the spatial boundaries marked as queer zones. In this way, there is liberation to be found in the crossing over of boundaries, because this means that queer territories are fluid and changeable, and don't have to be prescribed city zones set out by elites. From her study of lesbian women in New York, Gieseking (2014) suggests that queer women constantly move between spaces to define and

redefine spaces as queer through their bodies. In this sense, queer women do not necessarily have an identity based on spatial borders which can limit their everyday lives, but they cross over between different spaces to construct borders made through the body and its relationship to others in different spaces. This is helpful to this analysis because it offers a way of thinking about Instagram as a space that is imbued with the same social, cultural, and political ideas as a city. And in this way, it is possible to see how for Nicola and for Emma, Instagram is a space where borders and territories can be deconstructed and redefined through their embodiment as queer women. Where Nicola outlines how if her artwork were made up of oversexualised representations of women's bodies this would not be received so negatively, we can see how she understands that the space is defined by borders of acceptability which stem from ideas of heteronormativity and public spaces. Therefore, in the same way that the women in Gieseking's (2014) project used their bodies to position their gender and sexuality against the different neighbourhoods of New York, Nicola is using her art and specific representations of sexuality and the body to deconstruct and remake the borders of digital space. Moreover, we can see how she is using her art to cross over into spaces which are marked out, even if unconsciously marked out, as heteronormative to challenge the borders which exclude her. So, whilst online spaces may not be completely liberating in their potential to be disembodied utopias of fluidity, they do offer a sense of spatial liberation for queer women who are excluded from much of public space.

Cities were also important to the digital feminist artists in this research in the ways in which they perceived themselves as artists situated within specific art worlds. Although they are all digital artists, meaning that they produce and exhibit their work using digital technologies, physical geographical spaces remained important to them in how they conceptualised and navigated art spaces. The spaces that they occupied locally, in the locations that they worked from and lived in, served as a basis for their understanding of how they fit into the art world. For example, Christine explained how:

> I have a lot of support locally because I am, like, I'm in a smaller city, you know, I'm not like in New York or Atlanta or those kinds of places, I'm like a big fish in a small pond here so if I were in a bigger city, I might blend in a little bit more with what I'm producing

Throughout the previous chapters, there has been an emphasis placed on the ways in which gender is a mediating factor in the participation in art worlds. Women often struggle to be taken

seriously as artists due to the dualistic mythical constructs of the artists as male genius or the dabbling lady painter (Nochlin, 1988). In this way, I have outlined the ways in which gender intersects with visual art and have made a case for how this happens in digital spaces. However, there has been little attention placed on the intersection of art and geography outside of digital spaces both within this project and in academia more widely. Rose (2021) highlights how because art is so embedded within social and political life as cultural products, the way that it is produced can contribute to thinking about space and place. Further, Bain (2004) importantly argues that we cannot forget about the politics of individual artists who are producing work when considering geographic explanations, meaning that we must investigate the intersections between space, gender, and art as a way of understanding the sociocultural context whereby art happens. Popular notions of the artist are usually dominated by images of young people in the heart of dense urban spaces, being politically and socially active, and living an often bohemian lifestyle (Florida, 2002).

Although Markusen (2013) argues that this image is a stereotype which needs to be unpicked in order to acknowledge the value of artists outside of cityscapes, there is an historical and political relationship between city spaces and artists. Artists play a role in urban social movements, using art to mobilise resistance and protest, as well as being centrally located in giving voice to urban issues (Adams, 2002). As such, there exists a symbiotic relationship between artist and city whereby the identity of one rests on the other. For Christine, her place outside of the city is positive as it allows for the politics of her work to be seen and heard, where if she were working from one of the cities that she mentioned, then her work could get lost in the larger pool of feminist or political art that exists there. Outside of the city, she has the opportunity to construct an identity as an artist beyond the associations with policy, gentrification, and consumerism. Defining herself as an artist outside of the city is important because, according to Garfunkel (1984), women who are artists can struggle to internalise a professional identity as an artist because of the lack of vocational support coupled with the individualised myths of the artist. As Bain (2004) argues, physical and local spaces have a crucial role to play in the construction of an artistic identity for women. Whilst we have seen how the internet takes on traits of cities in relation to digital feminist artwork, considering how the relationship between geographical location and art constructs artistic identities for women has helped to further understandings of how space impacts digital feminist artists as individual women.

Similar parallels can be drawn between art in relation to cityscapes and how art is understood in online spaces. Some of the digital feminist artists involved actually preferred working in physical spaces rather than online especially for exhibiting their work. This is because they could have more of a personal experience with exhibiting in physical galleries where they often felt that their work could be seen as art, whereas online, they often thought that their work was just part of a mass of images that may not be perceived in the same way they would be in a physical gallery. For example, Christine continued to discuss her experiences:

> It's just how we navigate online space more so than we do physical space, whether it's like having a book in your hand or being in a gallery, you're present in there, and you feel almost like connected to it physically in a way, I feel, and you have to actually think about it maybe more than swiping through on your phone or browsing on a desktop computer, it's almost like you're ticking a box and it's just mindless, and there's so much on the internet like it's overwhelming so it's just one piece of many, so yeah, it's not special

Similarly, Katie described how she wants to show her work in more physical spaces because:

> I think that my work about social media, it needs to be seen in person and I feel like everything is so fast now that we have so much information but we are not looking for things specifically or processing it properly because it's super easy to swipe and people are not taking the time to observe

Here both participants make a distinction between online spaces and physical spaces which point to the differences between high and low culture which permeate the art world. In the literature review discussions took place regarding which spaces are constituted as art spaces, and traditionally museums and galleries marked the physical boundaries of class. The discussions also concentrated on how city spaces, through gentrification and urban regeneration, have become spaces where a meshing of high and low cultures happen. This means that art becomes more of a feature of commercial and consumerist institution rather than an institution concerned purely with aesthetics. The boundaries between consumption and aesthetics, and high and low culture are blurred across cityscapes with art featuring as part of a consumer landscape.

Online spaces, specifically Instagram, are an extension of this space in that they continue to blur the boundaries of high and low culture by hosting artwork in the same space as advertisements for consumer goods. Perhaps Christine and Katie are calling for a more defined

art space which separates out the aesthetic from the commercial in a way that would redefine the boundaries of art and consumption in terms of space. This is particularly important for digital feminist artists because of the ways in which feminism as a political movement has been increasingly aestheticized within contemporary digital popular culture. Crepax (2020) explains how within the context of Instagram, feminist politics are continuously intertwined with a postfeminist feminist aesthetic which is used as a marketing tool to encourage women and girls to consume goods. In this way, she asserts that the frivolous and the serious are meshed together in digital spaces, and so the politics of feminism have been absorbed into the aesthetic consumer advertisements which decorate Instagram. This is similar to how advertisements are displayed in public city spaces, as this blurring of politics and consumption in online spaces such as Instagram means that feminist art becomes part of a consumerist narrative and can lose its political associations.

The overwhelming feelings that Christine describes when discussing the internet, and Katie's observations that the internet is so fast and we don't take time to process images point to how online spaces have blurred the boundaries between art and consumption and this has a depoliticising effect for feminist politics. The desire from digital feminist artists in this sample to work in more physical spaces can be understood as a way of them wanting to reassess the boundaries of art and consumption that happen in different spaces, and mark out a specific space for feminist art to exist outside of its entanglement with consumerism. In this sense, wanting to exhibit in more physical spaces contributes to an act of feminist resistance whereby digital feminist artists want to unpick the meshing of boundaries in order to inject the politics of feminism into feminist art.

Overall, this section has highlighted the complex ways in which digital feminist artists in this sample navigate their practice in online spaces. In doing this, this section has explored how online spaces are not separate spheres of social life, but that they take on similar characteristics of public city spaces where cultural, political, and social inequalities are embedded and performed. As women, these digital feminist artists interacted with online spaces in an embodied way, and this invoked fears over safety which further blurred the lines between physical and virtual spaces. This was especially visible in exploring how the intersections of gender and sexuality mattered when considering navigating through online spaces. As such we can see how for these digital feminist artists, the internet as a space is not necessarily the disembodied utopia that cyberfeminism imagined. Instead, it is an extension of the city where social divisions are integrated in the design and architecture of public spaces, and this means

that online spaces are experienced through embodiment. Whilst there is resistance and liberation to be found in the crossing over of spatial boundaries for feminism, the meshing of spaces can also bring about the conflation of aesthetics and consumption. For digital feminist artists in this sample, this meant that sometimes they would prefer a redefined boundary to be drawn between spaces so that their work can remain central to a feminist politics rather than be central to consumerist narratives. What this section has demonstrated is that digital feminist artists experience online spaces through embodiment, from their specific standpoints in the physical world. However, their navigations of digital landscapes are not simply replicas of their navigations of physical spaces, as there are different types of challenges and boundaries associated with different spaces. What this section has shown is that there are multiple and fluxing tensions and boundaries for digital feminist artists associated with working in digital spaces, and these tensions are always experienced from specific standpoints in both the physical and social worlds.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how space, particularly online space, is important to the everyday experiences of digital feminist artists. In focusing on space, this chapter has highlighted feminist debates within cyberfeminism and has drawn out some of the complexities inherent to such discussions. From this, this chapter situates digital feminist artists within an already established field of feminist study and contributes to the discussion by noting how this sample of digital feminist artists and their work experience online spaces in their everyday lives. Cyberfeminist ideas are present in how digital feminist artists in this sample understand and navigate through digital spaces, and this is particularly noticeable in the first section of this chapter which explores how the idea of disembodiment is attractive for digital feminist artists. More specifically, the idea of the internet as a gendered space was explored and I focused on how the conception of the internet as gendered can contribute to a resistance to patriarchal binaries. Following a troubling of the notion of a feminine essence, the role of the digital avatar is considered in order to understand the ways in which digital feminist artists can draw from embodied experiences to challenge patriarchal understandings of online spaces.

In this way, cyberfeminist theories were useful in helping to investigate the feminist potential of my sample of digital feminist artists and their digital feminist art. Whilst this section offers a sense of resistance and liberation from digital feminist artists through online spaces, the next section sketched out the ways in which online spaces mirror the social life of public spaces and city spaces. In looking towards how fear is navigated online, and specifically for queer women,

as well as how identities are built around local spaces, I highlighted how the feminist resistance that digital feminist artists in my sample work towards can be regulated using online spaces. Moreover, the boundaries that are experienced in physical spaces are very similar to what is experienced in online spaces, meaning that online spaces are experienced through the body. This means that early cyberfeminist imaginings of a genderless utopia are yet to be realised, as boundaries are often reaffirmed in the regulation of digital feminist artists. This being said, there are still ways in which the crossing over of boundaries and the engagement with feminist theory constructs pockets of resistance in online spaces for digital feminist artists.

This chapter has incorporated knowledges from the previous two chapters, starting from the position that Instagram can be understood as a space of resistance, and that representation is also a resistive tool in the work of this sample of digital feminist artists. Thinking more carefully about space has allowed a more thorough understanding of how both Instagram and representation of women's bodies are challenging and complex. In looking at how space matters, I have zoomed further out from thinking specifically about Instagram and the body to explore the broader politics which exist around these matters. Ultimately this has allowed a fuller picture of digital feminist artists to be constructed, and acknowledges how their environments can impact their feminist resistance.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This research has explored the practices of digital feminist artists, which has included their experiences of working within digital spaces as well how they understand the content of the artwork that they produce. The aims at the beginning of this project were; 1: to critically examine the role of digital technologies within women's art practice and participation, 2: to identify ways in which women's digital art engages with feminisms to challenge political and cultural constructions of the body, 3: to draw from feminist epistemologies to critique and challenge institutional notions of doing sociological research, and 4: to explore how women's digital art constructs and changes contemporary feminist activisms. In order to meet these aims, I conducted sixteen unstructured online interviews with digital feminist artists and from there, constructed three inter-related themes. These themes are Instagram, representation, and space. Through these themes, and throughout the thesis more broadly, I have argued that digital feminist artists in this sample create spaces of resistance online through their work and practice, which destabilises structural binaries and creates new, different feminist knowledges and ways of knowing about both art and gender.

This chapter will consolidate the discussions and discourse constructed through this research project, whilst outlining the specific concluding arguments. Through exploring the initial aims, I will also return to the central ideas of resistance, representation, and online spaces which allow a more thorough discussion of how the notion of tension and binaries are crucial to my arguments and to the understanding of feminist resistance. Beyond this, I will outline the future research possibilities that must stem from this research in order to conceptualise the experiences of digital feminist artists more broadly.

With this project, I have contributed to the expansive and related disciplines of sociology of art and culture, and feminist theory by addressing the need for a contemporary analysis of women's experiences of digital spaces in the production of digital feminist art. This need was initially identified through my evaluation of existing literature across disciplines (chapter two) and was further explored through empirical analysis (chapters five, six, and seven). More specifically, in section 2.2 of the literature review, I explored different understandings of art worlds from within the sociology of art. Ideas from Becker (2008) were identified as being useful to this project because of the social approach to art worlds, as this debunks the myth of the artist being the male genius, an idea commonly challenged from within feminist art history

(see Garfunkel, 1984; Nochlin, 1998; Parker & Pollock, 2013; Pollock, 2003). Becker's (2008) work exposes the labour inherent to art worlds, and outlines the work of multiple social actors that feeds into the production of art. It is this focus on production that was helpful to this project in demonstrating how the process itself, as well as the art produced, is important to be investigated in a sociological way. The notion of conventions, the shared collective beliefs that organise cooperation within art worlds, allowed parallels to be drawn between Becker and Bourdieu's (1993) influential work on artistic fields. Bourdieu's (1993) argument that social positions are structured by power relationships between social actors offers a more structured account of how art happens, and this was influential within the project as it mirrors feminist analyses of the social world which position gender as the structural marker of difference (Oakley, 1972), and thus oppression in everyday life as well as in art worlds. In developing this section of the literature review, I concluded that a more nuanced approach to the production of art was needed. Echoing this conclusion, such a new approach should consider the impact of digital technologies on experiences of art, as well as incorporating the fluidity of embodiment rather than viewing social identities as fixed and binary.

In order to address this identified need, I designed and carried out this project from the position between Becker and Bourdieu, developing concepts from these traditional approaches, re-working and stretching them using a feminist theoretical lens to articulate and explore newer, more contemporary ways that women experience art worlds. Through situating the project within this particular body of literature with its foundations in sociology, I have both identified and addressed the need for a modernised approach to art worlds and spaces, and in doing so have embedded feminist art historical narratives into the sociology of art to focus specifically on the experiences of digital feminist artists. One of the values of this research then, is that it makes a contribution towards answering Howson's (2005) call for the development of a specifically feminist sociology of art.

Through a detailed engagement with different feminist epistemic positions in chapter three, I establish the ontological and epistemological basis of this project. A postmodern feminist ontological position was decided to be the most appropriate approach because it accounts for the multiple shifting and fragmented social locations that women occupy within the world and allows an understanding of their differences whilst recognising the structural categories that they construct their identities through and with. Following this, in chapter four, I detailed the methods used and my reflections on the methodological process. A qualitative methodology was justified based on this epistemic position, and the fieldwork for this project consisted of

sixteen unstructured online interviews with digital feminist artists. Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach, and from there I developed three interrelated themes which speak to the specified aims of the project.

8.2 Theoretical contributions

With theoretical contributions, each analysis chapter can be read as standalone, but together they offer an important interjection in debates around feminist theory, art production, and the use of digital spaces, and this has a bearing on how we can understand the wider topics of the value of technology for feminism, representation of bodies within visual culture, and embodiment. Not only is this important currently within the context of this research, but also in moving forward with continuing to develop a feminist sociology of art.

Moreover, this section will clearly outline each of the main contributions that this project makes to knowledge within the field of study, detailing how the arguments here address gaps and expand on sociological and feminist discussions. In doing this, I will also point towards limitations present within this project, and detail how such limitations can be addressed within future research.

8.2.1 Technology and art production

In aiming to critically examine the role of digital technologies within women's art practice and participation I have, through this project, explored a recent and continuously emerging field of digital feminist art. The use of Instagram has been identified as a specific site where everyday practices of resistance occur for this sample of digital feminist artists. This is significant because it addresses a gap within the literature and offers a contemporary example of how digital feminist artists experience their digital practices Where digital feminist art has been researched, it has not necessarily been articulated from a sociological standpoint. For example, Crepax (2020) explores the realm of Instagram feminism which creates discussions around the digitisation of contemporary culture. Whilst this work has been important to this project, it serves to further highlight the contribution to knowledge that this project makes. Crepax (2020) works from a feminist perspective but also from an aesthetics standpoint and does not solely focus on feminist art made by women, but refers to a broader feminist aesthetic of the everyday. In this way, whilst she does discuss digital feminist artwork, this is within the context of visual culture and aesthetics. Similarly, Gill (2011) and Smith (2015) both outline how social media is useful for a feminist aesthetic and discuss women's self-photography, but this does not address the experiences of production from digital feminist artists specifically.

As much as literature does exist about the notion of feminist art, and a focus on the themes of artwork, or women artists themselves, there is little in terms of a sociological approach to understanding the experiences of feminist artists as they relate to the digital. Moreover, some of the work highlighted within the literature review focuses on the images that women themselves produce, and explores debates around subject/object, but this contributes to feminist understandings of representation and visual culture (see for example Withers, 2008; Cottingham, 1996). Although representation does play a part within this project, the main gap that this project fills is to work from the perspective of digital feminist artists themselves, to examine their experiences of *being* feminist artists and how they experience online spaces as women who make art.

In this way, the use of Instagram as a space for feminist resistance in relation to the production of digital art is in itself a contribution to the literature. This is an important contribution because it offers an understanding of how feminism matters to technology and art production, beyond conceptualising feminism as only a broader social and political movement. This is valuable because it bridges the gap between feminism and the sociology of art, which in turn contributes to the development of a specifically feminist sociology of art (see Howson, 2005). Through this research, I have drawn connections between the Sociology of art and feminist art historical knowledges to position Instagram as a component in the experiences of producing and consuming digital feminist art, as well as offering a space whereby feminist resistance can, and does, happen through such practices.

8.2.2 Resistance

Whilst these findings focus on Instagram as a specific site where feminist resistance happens, they also speak to a broader discussion engaged with contemplating the notion of resistance itself. Throughout this research, I identified that the theme of resistance was central across all of the empirical chapters and in the underpinning ontological stance of the project itself. By focusing on the experiences of producing digital feminist art, I have argued that feminist resistance is an everyday practice for my sample of digital feminist artists to consciously find spaces of comfort and quiet, subtle rebellion. This particular notion of resistance asserts that power can be constructed in spaces which offer alternative ways of knowing about art, feminisms, and about the body.

As I have demonstrated in chapter five, resistance was framed through Instagram as a platform, but also by the ways my sample of digital feminist artists occupy and use the digital space to

perform and produce feminist knowledges. Resistance happens on Instagram by digital feminist artists consciously challenging boundaries which separate subject and object, and maintain a patriarchal binary. They did this through embedding a clear feminine subjectivity within Instagram through the work that they create and their presence on Instagram as women who make art. In working with the body as subject of their work, digital feminist artists in my research actively challenged the ways in which the platform attempted to regulate their work, and this conscious challenging and subversion of regulation contributes to the quiet yet powerful resistance that they practice.

This subversion of regulation techniques exposes the ways in which traditional art institutions place rigid self-censorship restrictions on women's work, and highlights the tensions inherent to art worlds and spaces. The back and forth between Instagram removing or censoring their work, and digital feminist artists reuploading and subverting the language of resistance highlights how resistance is a quiet and continuous conscious practice which is part of the experience of being a feminist artist. The use of Instagram, and the politics of the platform, allows digital feminist artists the space to construct new ways of knowing about feminist art by engaging with the very boundaries which maintain their status as outsiders of traditional art worlds.

In constructing this particular argument, I position this current research amongst previous feminist scholarship and add to it this notion of resistance. Specifically, Olszanowski (2014) highlighted how feminist artists engage in the augmentation of dominant modes of communication by playing with the censoring techniques of Instagram within their work. In this research, I have recognised the importance of Olszanowski's (2014) argument and position the current project as continuing her ideas and including a narrative of resistance. Whilst Olszanowski (2014, 91) perceives the 'unexpected power' within subverting censorship, my notion of resistance situates that power within the embodied ways in which my sample of digital feminist artists engage with their practice and with Instagram. In this way, I have contributed to feminist theorising of digital art practice by incorporating resistance into the discussions. Resistance is something personal, it is a way that digital feminist artists in this sample use Instagram to resist art world epistemologies that impact their experiences as artists and conceptualise their marginalisation from art institutions by playing within the tensions.

In this way, resistance is not framed here as something that happens, rather something that is *happening*. Resistance, for digital feminist artists involved in my research, happens quietly within the tensions between digital space, art worlds, and feminist politics.

Although in chapter five, I focused explicitly on Instagram as the site that this sample of digital feminist artists use the most within their practices, the contributions that this research makes to understanding resistance means that this argument can move beyond the platform. As such, digital feminist artists do not need Instagram to perform resistance, more that it is a contemporary example of how digital spaces can be used to foster a quiet and embodied resistance.

I discussed how resistance in digital spaces is often expressed through feminist activism and has associations with global protests and broad feminist movements (Rehman, 2017; Bayfield, 2020; Matich, 2019; Clark-Parsons, 2018). The value in digital spaces for feminist activisms, and thus feminist resistance, is that it allows global collective organising, and offers a space for feminist protest. Fourth-wave feminism is characterised by the contemporary use of social media specifically for feminist protest and resistance, mainly through its criticism of the commodification of both the body and women's sexuality (Zimmerman, 2017; Looft, 2017). Hashtags and artwork are central to feminist movements on social media and this fosters a far reaching and unified notion of feminist resistance. Resistance, in this form, is distinguished by its association to counterculture, and its outward rejection of patriarchal social order. I have discussed some of the ways in which such a universalising of digital feminist resistance is problematic, particularly highlighting how this type of resistance most often describes women's experiences from a white, western, privileged position. Also, because this type of feminist resistance ascribes to a specific aesthetic, it reinforces the commodification and marketisation of feminism that it initially seeks to disrupt.

My research contributes to this discussion by acknowledging the place of digital feminist artists within broader feminist social movements, as subscribing to the aestheticization of feminist resistance, but emphasises the value and the political power of a quieter, embodied, resistive practice. This notion stems from the emphasis on collective political action whilst spotlighting the ways in which resistance can matter to individual women from their own social location and specific standpoint in the world. This is important because it challenges understandings of how feminist resistance can happen particularly in digital spaces, championing the practice of constructing alternate ways of knowing rather than offering a universal feminist protest. Whilst

the tools of digital feminist resistance are utilised by digital feminist artists, the value of hashtags is discussed in chapters four and five for example, what this research demonstrates is that feminist resistance can exist outside of specific movements and moments, that resistance is an embodied practice and can be experienced through the embodied ways in which women engage with digital spaces.

8.2.3 Embodiment

The nature of embodiment is another concept that is central to this project and to the idea of feminist resistance. Discussions of embodiment have been developed through the methodology chapter, and most notably in chapter six. Digital embodiment, and the ways that digital feminist artists in this research engage with the notion of embodiment in part is a response to the second aim of this research: to identify how women's digital art engages with feminisms to challenge political and cultural constructions of the body. In chapter six I argue that digital feminist artists in this sample produce digital artwork and share it on digital platforms in order to reclaim the trope of the female nude, to construct a specific feminist visual language as a new way to think about the body and reimagine the female gaze. It is through this conscious engagement with feminist theory and ideas that resistance happens.

Working from the position of their own embodied experiences as women, digital feminist artists in my sample work to challenge patriarchal constructions of the body and reimagine a feminist visual culture through their work. For example, in reclaiming the female nude, participants drew from their embodied experiences in order to articulate their position as bodies to be looked at within patriarchal visual culture, and then reconfigure this binary by incorporating their subjectivity into their work. Within a digital space, as I explored in chapter six, the idea of embodiment is magnified as the binary between online and offline bodies appear static. However, embodiment is central to how this sample of digital feminist artists navigate their experiences of online spaces.

In chapter six, I explored the relationship between cyberfeminist ideas (Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1997; Sunden, 2001; Hinsey, 2020) and the experiences of my participants, and I have argued that digital feminist artists in this sample can and do perform small yet powerful acts of resistance to challenge patriarchal notions of the body by conceptualising digital space as a gendered space. This troubling of the binary is a conscious act of resistance because it challenges the naturalisation of the body as a marker of difference and exposes the fluidity of embodiment. As Young (2005) describes, the inhibited bodily practices of women allow space

for alternative possibilities for resistance. The contribution that this research makes to literature surrounding the nature of embodiment is that feminist resistance can exist through embodied experiences which move consciously between online and offline spaces. This project works from the specific lens of feminist digital artwork, and so it demonstrates that digital embodiment can be considered a resistive practice through the production of digital art.

This is important because it means that embodiment is not necessarily an inhibited bodily practice based on the corporeal physical markers of a gendered identity, and how we experience the world through them. Rather, embodiment moves beyond corporeality entirely and matters in a more fluid and fluxing sense of identity. This matters for thinking further about the experience of digital spaces, particularly in a gendered context, because it means that digital spaces are not distinct from offline realities, and that digital spaces can facilitate a reimagining of gendered embodiment which contribute to an alternative notion of feminist resistance. In this way, this project has contributed to the area of cyberfeminist thinking by further exploring the binary between on and offline spaces and developing an account of how artistic practice within digital space can offer new and more challenging ways to deconstruct a binary through subjectivity. Resistance then, happens through the conscious traversing of physical boundaries through embedding embodied subjectivity into digital artistic practice.

This particular idea of resistance that I have developed through this research is demonstrated across the broader themes of representation and space, and has implications for feminist theory beyond this project. As mentioned, in chapter six I argued that digital feminist artists in this sample practice feminist resistance through a reclaiming of representations of the body using digital technologies and spaces. This type of resistance is specific to digital feminist artists but also speaks to a wider feminist project of reclaiming the body. For example, there are more visible acts of resistive feminist practice with organised activism such as the women only Reclaim the Night marches and Million Women Rise marches (Carr, 2013). These visible acts of organised resistance are a clear challenge to the construction of, and knowledge about, women's bodies within social life (Carr, 2013). What I conclude from my research, however, is that resistance can be powerful in its quieter, less organised form, as it pertains to the everyday practices particularly of art making in digital spaces. As such, resistance is not only a collective feminist action, but an embodied practice. This type of resistance is powerful because it disrupts the epistemic basis of what it means to occupy and live with a body that is so widely represented through binaries which constitute womanhood. Moving forward beyond

this project, it is important to understand and consider the ways in which feminist resistance, particularly in terms of embodied resistance, matter to women engaged in feminist activisms.

This being said, this conceptualisation of feminist resistance is framed through privilege. By reflecting on this research project through a lens of privilege, there are a number of limitations that can be addressed, and this fosters multiple avenues for further research. In this way, this project can be used as a starting position into investigating and exploring the multiple nuanced intersections that exist within the field of study. In this research, my participants were white, young, able bodied, and lived in western societies. Whilst this particular demographic is commonly the most visible amongst feminist artists (Kretowicz, 2014), and particularly digital artists, this does pose specific challenges relating to the value of the arguments beyond the parameters of this project. The feminist values expressed by the participants were all western, white, feminist values, and these ideas underpinned their work as well as how they experienced digital spaces as feminist artists, and as women. Research on digital feminist activism has shown that it is most often these white feminist values which are central to online campaigns or online activist movements (Matich, 2019), and although this does contribute to a global and engaged feminist consciousness, it often renders intersectional experiences invisible in favour of a unified feminist message.

With the women who took part in this research all occupying a similar social position in terms of their privilege, the main limitation here is that this project potentially further contributes to a veiling of the marginalised and intersecting experiences, and perpetuate feminisms that are not universal truths, in a somewhat totalising way. As a white researcher who also occupies a specific privileged social location similar to the majority of participants, researching and representing women who experience the world through differing levels of privilege presents different ethical and epistemic challenges which have been explored in more detail in chapter three, but it is worth noting here that my positionality as a researcher means that any account of experiences stemming from this project would be through a lens of privilege (see Spivak, 1988; Peshkin, 1988). This being said, the engagement with feminist epistemology involves the conscious recognition of how the position of the researcher effects the ways in which data is gathered, analysed, and presented (Leatherby, 2003). This means that instead of simply ignoring and further marginalising intersectional voices, this project has encouraged a reflexive engagement with the notion of privilege itself, and in doing so has exposed these issues with privilege and difference as they relate to feminist digital artists. So, whilst the issue of privilege can be understood as a limitation of this project, the reflexive ways in which issues of

intersectionality has been grappled with throughout strengthens the value of the ontological approach.

8.3 Methodological contributions

Moving on to the third aim of this research project, to draw from feminist epistemologies and methodologies in order to critique and challenge institutional notions of doing sociological research, I have argued that the methods and methodology used contribute to the resistive practice central to the research.

Firstly, and as previously mentioned, the epistemic and ontological position that is taken from the outset of this project purposefully disrupts an academic tradition of producing a grand narrative and offering evidence to argue a specific idea (Harding, 1987). Instead, through a sustained engagement with the notion of feminist standpoints and postmodern epistemology, this project speaks to, and leaves space for, ontological differences in experiences. Whilst the previous discussion of the main limitation of this project points towards a lack of difference within the sample, and thus implies that a broader narrative of intersectional experiences would be insightful, this does not mitigate the meaningful ways in which resistance matters to individual women within their own specific social locations. Further, the methodological contributions that this research makes speak to the wider field of feminist methodology and ontology that exist beyond the content of the analysis and this specific sample.

A key strength of this project is how the methodology is situated within a feminist theoretical lens. In this way, I have used theory to inform method and methodology. The intertwining of feminist epistemology and methods allows a symbiosis and an alignment of the experience of doing this research, as the researcher, and the experiences of the women involved, as both artists and as research participants. This alignment was powerful in the sense that it helped to generate a shared sense of knowingness within the research relationship, and it allowed a greater sense of embodiment to be the standpoint from which I analysed the data. The methodology then, was not just a way to inform data gathering techniques that I developed, but it also informed the foundation of the analysis and the core arguments which pertain to the construction of new feminist knowledges. The methods and methodology, in an ontological and epistemic sense, transgressed the boundaries of method and became central to the way that I analysed the words of the women involved.

One important way that this relationship between theory and methodology shaped the project is through the notion of resistance itself. By drawing from feminist ontological and

epistemological histories, doing this research was generated from a tradition of feminist resistance within the academy. A central argument within the ideas of feminist epistemology and ontology, specifically the notion of feminist standpoints, is that the production of knowledge has been constructed from the experiences of those with most power (Letherby, 2003). Feminist ontology challenges and resists knowledges which are known as truths because that knowledge stems from a hegemonic ideological position. A feminist methodological approach aims to construct new and more fragmented accounts of women's realities, inclusive of their subjective and embodied ways of being in the world (Smith, 1997). In emphasising subjectivity and embodiment, feminist research actively resists the binaries which construct knowledge as objective, rational, and knowable.

Through engaging with the concept of research in this way, and through a reflexive approach to interviewing and analysing, I conceptualised the experiences of this sample of digital feminist artists as also grounded in a feminist ontological and epistemic position, and this frames their resistive practice. In the same way that I was resisting positivism and objectivity through feminist interviewing, the digital feminist artists that I spoke with were also resisting knowledges within the art world which have been constructed as truths. Through their digital practice and exhibiting their work on Instagram, they were consciously rejecting and resisting art historical narratives that place emphasis on the individual male genius and place work made by women into a category of women's art.

To perform resistance within both the research and within their art practice, it was important to imbue subjectivity and embodiment into the processes to highlight how knowledge about women's experiences and realities are situated within fragmented, subjective, and embodied social locations. Subjectivity and embodiment are inherent critiques of objectivity and so they structure alternative and multiple ways of knowing about women's experiences (Letherby, 2003). Similarly to the process of feminist interviewing, my participants drew from their embodied knowledges to create artwork, and this allowed their subjectivity to challenge the boundaries of both traditional art worlds and digital spaces. Both within the research and within their artistic practice, this feminist ontological position from which the work is grounded continues to consciously disrupt patriarchal notions of what counts as knowledge.

The value of recognising the conscious feminist politics of both research and the subject of the research is that it strengthens the critique of the ways in which knowledge has been constructed about the experiences of women. Moreover, the relationship between the epistemic position of

the researcher and that of the participants is characterised by its unlearning and rebuilding of feminist knowledge. Within this project specifically, this meant that the hierarchy of knowledge production was broken down, each digital feminist artist spoke from her own fragmented account of her realities and this was understood as meaningful knowledge from which to construct broader arguments. Through this engagement and entanglement with epistemology, resistance was at the forefront of the project both in terms of the way that research was conceptualised, and also in the ways in which we spoke about art production. As such, the power of this alignment of feminist politics is that it makes a stronger claim that feminist resistance happens through the destabilising of binaries which construct knowledges about women's positions in the social world. The theme of resistance underpinning the methodological focus created an openness for resistance to be articulated through the methods and this allowed the construction of alternative ways of knowing both within research and within digital feminist art.

The ontological basis of the project allowed for the use of more traditional feminist theory in order to fully situate and contextualise digital feminist art within narratives of feminist art history as well as within broader narratives of feminist sociological theory. The use of more classic feminist texts in analysing such a contemporary phenomenon is twofold.

Firstly, the use of more traditional feminist theory is useful because it highlights the value of the arguments made throughout the thesis. Using traditional feminist theory allows me to demonstrate how the arguments made are not specific to this contemporary moment, and are not only viable when thinking about Instagram. Instead the engagement, and re-engagement, with feminist theory that was written before Instagram existed tells us that those theories remain relevant and can be used to interpret and analyse contemporary feminist movements that are happening presently and in the future. The use of earlier feminist theory further demonstrated that resistance is not something that is platform specific, that it only happens on Instagram for this sample of digital feminist artists, but that there are histories of feminist resistance that lay the foundation for the practices that the participants consciously engage with in their everyday practices.

Secondly, the use of traditional feminist theory has ontological value. In aiming to challenge institutional notions of doing sociological research, drawing on traditional feminist theory to analyse contemporary art movements directly challenges and resists narratives of progression that are present within research cultures in academia. Therefore, the choice to analyse using

older theoretical ideas asserts the relevance of feminist theory and further solidifies the notion of resistance that runs throughout the project. In resisting narratives of progression, this research destabilises the foundations on which positivistic research is built from and asserts that the value of doing research lies within the meaning that it holds for participants.

A number of the methodological decisions made throughout the process of doing this research have resulted in useful definitions which contribute to methodological literature more broadly. Defining digital feminist artists as a specific population is one of the contributions that this project makes. Through a process of conceptualisation documented in section 4.2 (defining digital feminist artists) in the methodology chapter, I have defined digital feminist art as art which is created to consciously explore feminist themes using digital technologies. In this way, digital feminist art does not represent a genre or a specific time period, so is not necessarily about the work itself, but more focused on the process and experience of the artist and the method of creating and exhibiting.

As I noted in the Introduction (chapter one) and in section 4.2 of the methodology chapter, there has been in recent years an emerging presence of young, mostly white, women producing art that centres on their experiences as women engaging with digital spaces. Much of their work is characterised by web 1.0 and web 2.0 aesthetics and nineties pop culture references in order to explore identities (Kretowicz, 2014). Within popular culture, the term 'digifeminist artists' (Kretowicz, 2014) has been coined to refer to this phenomenon. Although this term is helpful in identifying and describing a particular artistic style, and in highlighting the presence of these artists within popular culture, the definition of digital feminist artists that I offer with this project provides a broader understanding of the phenomena.

This project has foundations within the sociology of art, and therefore seeks to engage with the structures which constitute the experience of art from a feminist perspective, the definition of digital feminist artist needed to incorporate both the process of the artist as well as the work that they produce. As such, within this project the term 'digital feminist artists' refers to women who create artwork to consciously explore feminist themes through the use of digital technologies to produce or exhibit their work. This definition encompasses traditions of feminist art history by acknowledging that feminist artists work consciously to explore the political experiences of gender, and also acknowledges that the ways in which we interact with digital spaces impacts gendered embodied experiences of producing art. Giving definition to women who create this type of work in this way is an important contribution because it offers

a further definition of feminist artists which incorporates the contemporary intersections of feminism and technology.

Another conclusion that I have drawn from exploring the methodological aspects of this project is that digital feminist artists can be considered a specific 'hidden population'. Whilst most definitions of hidden populations include an element of geographic dispersion, a lack of official register to be used as a sampling frame, or participant vulnerability (Baltar & Goriup, 2012), this project has identified a specific set of circumstances by which digital feminist artists can be considered a specific hidden population.

Previous research has highlighted how artists are a hidden population in themselves. Jeffri, Heckathorn, and Spiller (2011) detailed how lots of artists are self employed and work privately meaning that there is no sampling frame to draw from, and they also posit that art markets thrive on inter-artist contacts who belong to specific organisations, so sampling beginning with known artists would only allow access to the artists who work professionally and belong to organising bodies which define them and their work as marketable. From the artists that they worked with in their study of ageing artists in New York City, they found that the majority of women artists sampled felt discriminated against within their professional lives on the basis of them being women. Their findings follow a history of women feeling excluded from traditional art worlds, but this finding serves a specific function in identifying a further layer of the hidden-ness of this sample.

The current project builds on this thinking and argues that digital feminist artists are a specific hidden sample. This sample of women have varying levels of affiliation with traditional art world spaces, the majority are self employed, and they are also geographically dispersed. Jeffri, Heckathorn, and Spiller's sample were all associated with New York City, digital feminist artists have no tangible location from which to sample. Their work and profile as artists mostly live in digital spaces including personal websites and social media. There are no communal spaces from which they can work. This means that this sample is mostly invisible from public spaces so much more difficult to access. Further, feminist art is often associated with protest and can be purposefully provocative. Much feminist artwork is sanctioned because it challenges convention and this makes many feminist artists remain hidden in order to maximise the reach of their political work without sanction. This often purposeful anonymity paired with the geographical dispersion framed through the digital spaces they occupy, layered with the institutional invisibility of women who create art, means that digital feminist artists are a very

specific form of hidden population. This is an important conclusion to draw because it offers a deeper lens to the concept of hidden populations. By contributing to the definition of what constitutes a hidden population, this project can offer itself as evidence towards understanding how intersectional identities create multiple layers of hidden-ness which pose specific methodological challenges for researchers interested in working with this population.

8.4 Future research

The aforementioned issues pertaining to privilege and difference must be addressed in a number of ways through further study. As a direct springboard from the present research, future research is needed to understand how different intersecting identities matter in the production of digital feminist artwork, and how artists who embody multiple marginalised social positions navigate their subjectivity through artwork within digital spaces.

Whilst the aims here specifically address the experience of digital spaces, some participants did express how their physical geographical location impacts their engagement with both feminisms and digital cultures. For example, women who were located in more politically conservative countries valued online spaces to help maintain their anonymity when producing particularly liberal feminist artwork that criticised current policy or social norms. For others, their geographical location did not prompt issues of safety, and they felt confident with sharing their work publicly and having a more public profile amongst their communities. As such, there are considerable tensions surrounding how feminist artists turn to digital platforms to share and exhibit their work, and in turn this has an impact on how women in different geographical locations experience and perform resistance. This tension surrounding space in relation to accessing feminisms and digital platforms is an issue that a more intersectional approach must investigate further.

As well as this, this research did attract women from geographically dispersed locations, and although the majority of these places were geographically in the global north and westernised, the experiences of the politics within specific countries may impact the ways in which resistance is felt and experienced through digital feminist art making. As demonstrated throughout the analysis, there are tensions that exist between experiences of the virtual and the physical and although movement between these spaces can be fluid and is embodied, the physical geographical locations from which we experience the world impacts our relationships with feminism more widely. The political situations for women within different geographical locations will be an important element to explore in future research because this will impact

the experiences of resistance for digital feminist artists. A sustained analysis of privilege between digital feminist artists could explore how physical spaces matter, and generate a more thorough understanding of the relationship between geography, politics, and digital feminist art.

Similarly, future research must address and explore queerness in relation to digital feminist art production. Whilst I have mentioned specific examples of how queer identities and cultures are central to some of the digital feminist artist's practice, a more focused analysis of digital feminist art through a queer lens would provide further intersectional knowledges about the topic. Queer cultures have a specific relationship to art in that they have historically been central in challenging the male gaze and destabilising heteronormativity in visual culture (Burston & Richardson, 1995; Reed, 2011). With a growing emergence of digital queer focused art by LGBTQ+ artists (Lord & Meyer, 2019), there is a clear need to further understand how this current notion of a quiet resistance can be framed through queerness especially in relation to the digital sphere. This future research could address the experience of embodied queerness through the production of digital artwork, and this could challenge notions of what it means to occupy digital space from a marginalised social location.

Future research must also address the changes that have happened within digitally mediated art spaces since the beginning of this project. Since embarking on this research, there have been significant changes within art spaces, and this has impacted communities outside of feminism. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that many physical galleries were closed, and this saw a rise in exhibitions moving into online platforms as well as a rise in digital art making. This period of emerging digital art practice is important to consider because, as artist and academic Paula Gerstenblatt (2020; 602) notes, 'we are currently living an unfolding historic trauma and someday our art will become an important part of the collective narrative – what we saw, felt, lost, and gained'. Whilst she is not referring specifically to feminist related artwork, the ways in which art matter to our everyday experiences is worthy of recognition as the consumption or participation in art spaces is becoming increasingly intertwined with our digital lives.

This means that the way we engage with traditional art spaces is changing, and this may offer more space for reflection on what art making or participation in artistic communities can be used for. Researchers have already noted tensions within traditional art markets who have had to move to digital spaces due to the pandemic, because art world actors are finding it increasingly difficult to engage with the evaluation and appreciation of artwork outside of the

traditional gallery setting (Buchholz, Fine, & Wohl, 2020). This move to the digital offers up the potential for resistance towards the elitist notions of the gallery world, which this research explores throughout, and we could continue to see different types of disruptions to the meanings of art worlds. In thinking about themes of resistance, there is scope to develop more avenues of research to distinguish where the tensions happen within the art world in this shifting moment in time, which boundaries are disrupted with a move towards digital spaces, and how resistance might be happening for different communities because of this social and cultural change.

There is also scope to further develop this notion of resistance for digital feminist artists within different types of digital spaces. Although an abundance of research already exists regarding feminist activisms in relation to digital spaces (see Matich, 2019; Bayfield, 2020), the ways in which digital platforms, specifically social media, constantly shift and evolve mean that there are constantly new spaces which digital feminist artists can access and engage with in order to perform their resistive practices. At the time that this research was carried out, Instagram was the main platform used by my sample of digital feminist artists and TikTok, a social media platform where users can watch randomised short videos produced by other users, was not widely used. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, TikTok has seen a rise in users and now boasts six hundred and eighty-nine million active users worldwide. Because of this popularity, TikTok has already been named a huge new player in the contemporary arts market and Gerlieb (2021) points towards the use of TikTok for feminist artists specifically. She suggests that feminist artists create buyer markets through the app, and they use it to build a feminist community by using hashtags and performance work. Gerlieb (2021) identifies that TikTok, similarly to Instagram, has a bias with the algorithms where people of colour were not made as visible and often banned, and she urges that further research into the relationship between TikTok and feminist art to be done in order to fully investigate the function and potential for feminist art and artists. The future research that she suggests could also explore how resistive practice might be present on TikTok, to contribute to an understanding of how a digital feminist resistance might happen across different digital platforms that offer different possibilities for visibility and representation.

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