THESIS

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE (DIGITAL) RESISTANCE: POLITICS AND POWER IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE (DIGITAL) RESISTANCE: POLITICS AND POWER IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES

The 2017 Women's March on Washington marked a significant moment in contemporary U.S. political history as hundreds of thousands of women gathered on the National Mall in an expression of embodied dissent. Key women's movement groups, Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project, operated as powerful collectives in the time leading up to the 2016 presidential election and the subsequent 2017 Women's March. Their transition from sites of rhetorical secrecy to embracing the strategic publicity of the 2017 Women's March illuminates how ego-function, reversed symbolism, and consciousness raising impact social movements in our digital age. To understand how social movement groups navigate rhetorical secrecy and strategic publicity, this thesis explores how the ego-functional responses of Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project led to the deployment of specific rhetorical tactics to cultivate collective identities. I argue that the transitionary process from rhetorical secrecy to rhetorical publicity allows collectives to legitimate and orient themselves as key political actors. This thesis also calls scholars to mindfully attend to the ramifications digital technologies have on our understandings of rhetorical strategies and structures, particularly as they pertain to contemporary social movements.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On November 9, 2016, Hillary Rodham Clinton climbed the stage at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City. In a brief, twelve-minute address, Clinton conceded the 2016 presidential election to Republican candidate Donald J. Trump. Wearing her signature pantsuit outfit, she spent a considerable amount of time thanking those who worked tirelessly to campaign on her behalf. “You poured your hearts into this campaign. . . And to the millions of volunteers, community leaders, activists and union organizers who knocked on doors, talked to neighbors, posted on Facebook, even in secret, private Facebook sites. . . I want everybody coming out from behind that and make sure your voices are heard going forward.”[1] This indirect reference to a secret Facebook coalition of Clinton supporters received knowing laughter throughout the live audience and Clinton continued forward with her acknowledgements. This textual wink towards a secret collective of supporters resonated with those who had rallied behind Clinton’s campaign, validating their collective efforts on her behalf.[2]

Two months later, on January 21, 2017, an estimated five hundred thousand demonstrators donned neon pink “pussyhats” descended upon the National Mall in Washington D.C. to protest the inauguration of Donald J. Trump.[3] Millions of additional activists staged solidarity marches around the world, ranging from the Womxn’s March[4] in Seattle to locations as remote as a science station in Antarctica.[5] Commenting on the impressive number of protestors, President Trump tweeted: “Watched protests yesterday but was under the impression that we just had an election! Why didn't these people vote? Celebs hurt cause badly.”[6] Trump’s assumption that the thousands of American demonstrators did not vote, while unfounded and untrue, does illustrate one of the most striking issues surrounding the 2016 presidential campaign and election. Although the Clinton campaign surpassed the

Trump campaign in fundraising, numerous polls predicted that Clinton would sail to victory. While Clinton *did* eventually claim the popular vote, many media sources had commented on the lack of enthusiastic support for Clinton as a candidate throughout the campaign.[7]

As numerous scholars have noted, this fact can be credited in part to the precarious position Clinton inhabited within a post-feminist political culture.[8] Clinton's political service as first lady, a U.S. senator, and secretary of state prior to her presidential bid in 2016 situated her within innumerable double-binds.[9] As Shawn Parry-Giles notes, "[w]omen's controversial presence in these contested spaces suggests that legislative and electoral politics—as it was for suffragists long ago—still isn't a welcoming place for women, particularly outspoken ones."[10] Additionally, Clinton's visible health issues in the months leading up to election day, amongst other scandals and strategic errors, sullied her media image and stalled her campaign's momentum.[11] Through Clinton's tumultuous campaign journey, a group rose up to support her. Calling themselves Pantsuit Nation, this Facebook community thrived in secrecy with news outlets only tangentially covering the possible effect they could have on the election.[12] Pantsuit Nation's political conversations remained within its private online space until after the election, when the reality of Trump's victory brought the hard-learned lesson: its secret had to go public.

In this thesis, I investigate how, in the wake of Donald J. Trump's presidential campaign and subsequent election as president, key U.S. women's groups created particular collectives ripe for engaging in political action. These collectives took two primary forms: online forums or communities characterized by some element of privacy or secrecy, and public displays of political protest. Driven by the elicited emotional pain from the campaign and election, these women strategically shifted tactics of engagement from relatively secret

spaces such as Pantsuit Nation's secret Facebook page to the public spectacle of the 2017 Women's March on Washington. The process of analyzing this movement from privacy to publicity in our current technological age offers fruitful avenues for investing contemporary social movements.

Within the study of social movement rhetoric, "ego-function" has played a central role in analyzing social movement protests. Richard Gregg describes ego-function as having "to do with constituting self-hood through expression; that is, with establishing, defining, and affirming one's self-hood as one engages in a rhetorical act."[13] Gregg's process illustrates ego-function working as either deprivational or affirming. However, as Karma Chávez illustrates, the limiting nature of this "either/or" dichotomy ignores the ways in which social movements rarely have a singular "ego."[14] In this thesis, ego-function illuminates the ego-deprivation, which I characterize as a multitude of emotional responses, Trump's campaign and election generated for millions of U.S. citizens. I examine how the emotional frustration experienced by women after Trump's electoral victory drove key women's groups to shift their collective focus from establishing communities of rhetorical secrecy to embracing the spectacle of strategic publicity.

In the case of Pantsuit Nation, the collective began as a "secret" site online available only to those who were invited to join. Through analyzing the group's published posts, contextualized in media coverage, its transition process becomes apparent. In response to the internal and external pressures to orient themselves as political actors, they joined the publicly resistive act of the 2017 Women's March on Washington. For the Pussyhat Project, this process began with local knitters in Los Angeles, then quickly pivoted to an online space to share knitting patterns for the "Pussyhat" with individuals across the country and the

world. These hats—and the communities responsible for them—became a prominent symbol of the 2017 Women's March on Washington. This transitionary process from secrecy to strategic publicity within protest movements such as the 2017 Women's March remains relatively unexplored in present scholarship. While scholars have noted how enclaves and counter-publics experience "withdrawal and regroupment," recent technological advances have changed how online spaces function within social movements.[15] Now, more than ever, our communication technologies allow collectives to interact in secret across geographic, temporal, and economic boundaries. As a scholar invested in understanding how social groups enact protest, I believe it is imperative to interrogate how the digital age continues to redefine the increasingly blurred line between private and public life, particularly within American democracy.

In this introduction, I provide a brief overview of women's political social movements in America and the role of rhetorical secrecy and transparency within American political society. I then outline the critical perspectives that inform this project: feminist criticism and the ego-function of rhetorical publicity. Finally, I provide an overview of the chapters that contain my analyses.

Women's Political and Social Movements in America

The first historically recognized American convention for women's rights occurred in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The resulting manifesto, "The Declaration of Sentiments," was modeled after the United States' own "Declaration of Independence" and demanded the rights of citizenship for American women.[16] In the document, convention attendees argued that women and men should be considered equal under U.S. law. This framing of U.S.

citizenship positioned women on par with men, thus entitling them to the right to vote, own property, and pursue education, among other civil liberties.[17] This declaration set in motion a multi-decade long struggle for the U.S. American woman suffrage movement, finally resulting in the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which granted women the right to vote.

Within communication studies, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's germinal work, *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, artfully chronicles the rise of the women's rights movement from the early 1840s into the early 1900s. Her work consisted of close textual analysis of speeches from feminist icons such Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Sojourner Truth. These texts addressed issues concerning African American women's lives in the 1800s, women's suffrage, abolition and temperance, redefined the role women and women's movements played within studies of rhetoric and public address.[18] Building upon that legacy, scholars including Angela G. Ray and Belinda A. Stillion Southard have investigated the rhetorical tactics and identity construction the suffragists deployed throughout their pursuit of voting rights. The woman suffrage movement implemented the strategies of ritualized performance, political symbolism, and embodied protest within specific locations.[19] This heritage of site-specific embodied protest continues throughout the contemporary women's movements in America, especially as media technology continues to progress.[20] As technology changes the very way in which bodies engage in political protest, it becomes increasingly imperative to interrogate emergent digital communities that continue the legacy of women's rights protest in the United States. Drawing on this rich historical legacy, my project seeks to deepen scholastic understanding of the rhetorical threads between historical and contemporary women's social movements in the United States.

Rhetorical scholarship of social movements more broadly contends with the nature of defining a social movement. Leland M. Griffin, widely considered the first rhetorician to advocate the study of social movements, proposed the complex phenomena of social movements presented rhetorical patterns worthy of critical investigation.[21] Specifically, Griffin argued that rhetorical scholars must interrogate social movements themselves, not just single rhetors within social movements, because movements reveal how rhetoric functions in broader public discourses. Illuminating these rhetorical patterns requires analysis of the recurring themes and strategies deployed by a social movement. For example, within the historical women's liberation movement, Campbell identified core strategies and defined rhetorical techniques shared across the various permutations of the movement.[22] Generally speaking, social movements are a product of sustained efforts by a collective to take up resources in the pursuit of resistance on behalf of a cause. It is then the task of the rhetorical scholar to understand how these efforts are conveyed through rhetorical strategy.[23]

Within our understanding of rhetorical strategy, it is important to acknowledge the moves feminist scholars have made in integrating intersectional approaches to digital activism within social movements. Hester Baer's analysis of digital activism campaigns and neoliberal politics reveals how digital platforms facilitate oppressive neoliberal logics in feminism, while simultaneously offering new subjectivities.[24] Likewise, scholars such as Annie Hill, Shenila Khoja-Moolgii, and Karma Chávez have demonstrated how digital media and social media have influenced a group's ability to organize coalitions and to enact public protests.[25] Digital platforms offer activists and organizers the tools to mitigate temporal and geographic barriers in building relationships and enacting protest. The role digital media has in group organization is clear, but another piece of the puzzle requires pointed inquiry. Specifically, I aim to understand

the role the transition from privacy to strategic disclosure plays in the way a feminist collective expresses itself in protest. The relegation of women to the private sphere, and their prohibition from engaging with the public sphere, has been long enforced by hegemonic discourses. Therefore, examining the significance and cultural valuation between the divisions of the public and private spheres is part of the legacy of feminist scholarship.[26] In this thesis, I investigate how Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project deployed specific rhetorical strategies throughout their transition from online privacy to the embodied publicity of the 2017 Women's March on Washington. These strategies allowed them to unify and then move towards resistive action as collectives.

This strategic transition made by Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project demonstrates the power of two transformative forces: ego-function (or an elicited emotive response) and the transition from secrecy to publicity. Traditionally, the theory of ego-function serves scholars seeking to understand how a social movement locates itself within social hierarchies. Gregg's work regarding ego-function within social movements hinges on the following process: the oppressed experience ego-deprivation, identify an oppressor, locate themselves against that oppressor, and constitute self-hood in the expression of their location through an act of protest which then results in ego-affirmation for the oppressed.[27] The shared, emotional experience created through oppression provides a catalyst for collectives to identify the source of that pain and then respond through dissent. Dissent serves to affirm the value of the suffering collective's self-hood through expression and identification of needs and/or wants. In this project, I examine how widespread grief and subsequent anger at Trump's election initiated the transitionary process of key women's groups engaging with Women's March in Washington as public display of embodied dissent. In historical self-directed social movements and protests, scholars have

identified that movement members often suffer from despair, insecurity, feelings of inferiority, and marginalization.[28] These felt experiences result in individuals locating their oppressor and positioning themselves in expressions of dissent against the oppressive force. The distress felt by members of a movement goes beyond emotion and incites a need for individuals to legitimate themselves in an unwelcoming political sphere. For the contemporary women's movement in the United States, the self-directed nature of the 2017 Women's March on Washington protest seemingly fits within this pattern.

Scholars have traditionally used ego-function to critique social movements, pointing to how protestors often struggle to transition from the self-image of a victim to one of power.[29] For example, Charles J. Stewart has shown through his analysis of protest songs that activist singers often struggle to re-envision themselves with power after articulating how that power was stripped from them. Attention must be paid to the ego-functional role sites and rhetorical artifacts play in how individuals come to locate themselves and express their dissent. Previous scholarship regarding the ego-functional role of rhetorical artifacts reveals how they can affirm participants as legitimated actors and thus locate themselves in the social hierarchy.[30] For example, in Susan Zaeske's work regarding the signatures of 19th century female abolitionists on anti-slavery petitions, she illuminates how the act of signing one's name reaffirms one's social and political identity. In the case of the female abolitionists, it located them as political subjects independent from their fathers or husbands, despite their disenfranchisement as non-voting citizens. Ego-function's ability to reveal the purpose and rhetoricity of specific rhetorical actions and texts continues to serve scholarship as we engage with new protest movements like the 2017 Women's March on Washington. Engaging the women's social movement literature with ego-function reveals how the use of sites (such as Facebook and the National Mall) and rhetorical

artifacts (such as the pussyhats) allow for the transition from rhetorical secrecy to publicity. This transition takes the collectives of delegitimated individuals and affords them the political power to engage in legitimating expressions of protest.

Rhetorical Secrecy and Publicity in American Politics

The issue of transparency and secrecy has long plagued the American public and political culture. Leland M. Griffin, reflecting upon the historic Antimasonic movement in the United States, observed: “The conflict between secrecy and democracy would appear to be recurrent phenomenon in our national history. Indeed, since the flowering of the modern secret society in the eighteenth century, antisecretism as a state of mind has been an enduring fiber in the pattern of Western culture.”[31] The assumptions of democracy in the United States, in Griffin’s estimation, demand transparency. Within American cultural contexts, secret societies, as collectives set apart from the public sphere, cannot fully engage with democracy due to this established standard.

Throughout U.S. history, this tension between secrecy and transparency has inundated secret exclusive organizations. Publicity, the performance of transparency, acts to meet the demand for transparency required for organizational survival and democracy.[32] Jürgen Habermas describes how the convening of societies generated their own publics when he observed how the original members of Masonic lodges were not seeking to be exclusionary, but instead were resisting their experience under political totalitarianism. “The coming together of private people into a public was therefore anticipated in secret, as a public sphere existing largely behind closed doors,” he wrote.[33] For both of the online groups featured in this thesis project, their survival within the American political sphere required a move towards strategic publicity.

Although the pressure for a secret group to "go public" causes strain on an organization, it is often the case that the group's survival depends on strategic disclosures and publicity.[34] Joshua Gunn argues that "there is a direct relationship between secrecy, publicity and the formation of publics."[35] This suggests that for the current women's movement, women's ability to (re)orient themselves as actors engaged in democratic dissent was dependent upon the transition from secrecy to publicity. Jodi Dean reaffirms the importance of interrogating this relationship when she suggests that "democratic politics has been formatted through a dynamic of concealment and disclosure, through a primary opposition between what is hidden and what is revealed."[36] In her view, that which is considered "secret" functions as a marker of vulnerability, and the act of concealing works to protect something or someone.[37] The strategic disclosure of political collectives through the 2017 Women's March on Washington is worthy of scholarly investigation in order to understand how this group established themselves as collectives publicly engaged in civic democratic process.

When discussing how collectives enact political protest in the contemporary public sphere, the critic must consider which structures of power the collective engages with in discourse. Additionally, one must account for the role of technology and mass media because public discourse no longer depends on face-to-face interaction, but utilizes digital technologies to span temporal, geographic, and economic boundaries to generate resistive action. In his initial conception of the public/private divide, Habermas noted that public spheres depended on rational discussion, the necessity of face-to-face conversation, and a lack of accounting for economic or social inequalities.[38] More recent scholarship, such as Kevin DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples's analysis of the WTO protests in Seattle, offers an extension of understanding of public spheres within the context of mass media. They argue, "[t]he public sphere mediates between civil

society and the state, with the expression of public opinion working to legitimate and check the power of the state."[39] In the 2017 Women's March on Washington, the participants engaged with the public sphere by socially, digitally, and physically locating themselves against the power of the state, embodied by Trump.

This transitionary process from secrecy to strategic publicity reveals how digital technology impacts political discourse. The traditional lines between the private and public spheres are more blurred due to digital technologies. While feminist scholars have investigated the ways collectives organize, self-identify, and express dissent, the strategic conversion from secrecy to strategic publicity through digital media platforms merits further investigation to extend and nuance our understanding of collective (digital) resistance. The 2017 Women's March on Washington offers a fruitful opportunity to investigate the power behind the strategic moves by Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project from a private collective to a public political actor on the national stage.

Critical Method and Selection of Texts

Studying social movements as texts requires scholars to interrogate commonalities across the messages surrounding a movement. The technological integration of the digital age further complicates articulating a unified, single women's movement in contemporary U.S. politics. Accounting for the fragmentary nature of social movements, I selected two self-named collectives deeply enmeshed within efforts leading up to the 2017 Women's March on Washington. Given the visibility of Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project within the 2017 Women's March, these two collectives offer appropriate case studies for this thesis project.[40] I examined discoursed produced by the organizations themselves, which took diverse forms,

including a book, blog posts, and visual icons. I gained additional insight about the movement strategies from journalistic accounts representing a variety of editorial perspectives. I analyzed discourse produced between October 1, 2016 and May 30, 2017, a timeline that encompasses coverage prior to the presidential election through the public responses to the 2017 Women's March on Washington. Both Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project illuminate how ego-deprivation fueled the transition from private collectives to strategically public demonstrations of resistance.

In the analysis chapters that follow, I provide the origin narratives for these two groups to detail how these collectives invited individual participation and motivated women to unite around a shared goal: the 2017 Women's March on Washington. Additionally, I detail the reasoning behind my specific text selection pertaining to each group. Given the nature of the collectives under investigation and the texts each group produced, I use two major analytical lenses within the scope of this project. In the following sections, I outline how (digitized) feminist criticism and the ego-function of rhetorical publicity ground my method of rhetorical analysis.

(Digitized) Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism interrogates important relationships between societal power structures and marginalized groups. As such, groups enacting resistance rightfully inhabit a key area in feminist research, given that women's liberation should be primarily concerned with liberation for *all* peoples. This project seeks to situate the 2017 Women's March movement within our society's technological context, necessitating what I refer to as a *digitized feminist* lens.

The digital feminism literature gestured to earlier in this thesis points toward how digital media functions in feminist collective action. As Baer describes it, "By bringing together diverse feminist constituencies, digital platforms enable new kinds of intersectional conversations."[41] There has been valuable work established in how digital media presents new challenges and opportunities for marginalized voices to publicly express themselves to broader communities.[42] Therefore, this thesis seeks to extend this line of questioning through developing a clearer understanding of how traditional rhetorical strategies have transitioned into our digitally mediated age and enable groups engage in resistive action. Investigating Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project's development as secret collectives and their strategic deployment of rhetorical publicity will illuminate new dimensions in this evolution.

For example, the digital collectives of Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project are directly tied to what Karlyn Kohrs Campbell identifies as hallmark rhetorical tactics within previous historical women's movements. Writing in 1973, Campbell asserted that a rhetorical analysis of women's liberation required a distinct critical approach due to the unique substance and style characterizing the struggle for women's equality in the 19th and 20th centuries.[43] Speaking as a woman, particularly in the political realm, violated established gender norms or "the reality structure."[44] For centuries, countless female political activists negotiated these societal expectations, some embracing specific roles and others attempting to usurp them completely.[45] Campbell's work provides examples within historical women's liberation, identifying the distinct strategies of symbolic reversal and consciousness raising employed by the historical women's liberation movement. This pursuit of transforming the political conversation through such strategies remains relevant in contemporary political discourse. This thesis aims to

interrogate how women have extended and expanded these traditional rhetorical tactics in response to the societal and organizational changes offered by digital technology.

Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project both utilized consciousness raising in their collective organization and eventual mobilization in the 2017 Women's March. Consciousness raising rejects the traditional rhetorical conception that a group must have an expert or key leader that acts as shepherd, leading willing sheep-like participants towards a political goal. Instead, Campbell explained that within consciousness raising rhetorical strategy, "[t]here is no leader, rhetor, or expert. All participate and lead; all are considered expert. The goal is to make the personal political: to create awareness (through shared experiences) that what were thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared, a result of their position as women."[46] This means women's liberation is powered by the work of collectives, not only single actors.

Since Campbell's groundbreaking article, numerous other scholars have adopted similar critical approaches, and yet all emphasize the importance of analyzing how individual women form collectives in their attempt to enact political change. Moving into more contemporary analyses, Sara Hayden points towards the centrality of dissent and self-determination within feminist advocacy.[47] The potentially damaging universalizing nature of consciousness raising is rightfully challenged, because the hegemonic structures surrounding participants can privilege certain experiences over others. However, Hayden still acknowledges its role in generating collective rhetorics built through the combined experiences of rhetors and audiences.[48] Hayden demonstrates the continued relevancy of interrogating the role and utilization of consciousness raising within social movements as a rhetorical strategy. Her nuanced analysis of consciousness raising as potentially universalizing offers important insight regarding the structures surrounding

the strategy and its use. For this thesis, the structures surrounding the consciousness raising efforts of Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project play an important role in understanding its impact on the Women's March on Washington.

For example, Pantsuit Nation's use of Facebook as an organizational networking tool exemplifies how the consciousness raising paradigm might translate into the digital age. While 3 million members means Pantsuit Nation does not fit the small group assumption of traditional consciousness raising, the lack of a single expert and emphasis on members sharing their personal experiences characterizes it a consciousness raising enterprise. The shared solidarity generated through the sharing of thousands of videos, pictures, comments and written posts in a secret site propelled the community toward public, embodied protest. The effect of consciousness raising's synergy with social media is a new hallmark of political activism in this digital era. The Pussyhat Project's origins as a small group at a local knitting shop fit a more traditional model of consciousness raising, but its transition to an online initiative further illustrates how this traditional rhetorical tactic translates into the digital age.

Another pertinent historically established women's liberation tactic within my analysis concerns symbolic reversal, the act of taking up a symbol typically considered a negative by society and elevating it to a positive entity.[49] Invoking the pantsuit as her collective's symbol demonstrates Libby Chamberlain's continuance of the symbolic reversal Clinton began by deploying her publicly mocked attire as a sign of her own power.[50] Likewise, the symbolic reversal of the word "pussy" and the pink cat ear design of the knitted hats employed by the Pussyhat Project demonstrate this rhetorical technique's profound political effect. Symbolic reversal also relates to the role strategic publicity played in the mass mobilization and divulgence of previously private communities as subjects in the public political sphere. The dramatic visual

flair of the pussyhats created a symbol of women's liberation that literally colored the 2017 Women's March on Washington and merits examination.

Rhetorical Secrecy and Publicity

For both Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project, the transition from rhetorical secrecy to a public collective necessitates requires analysis rooted in the relationship between rhetorical secrecy and publicity. Charles Morris III asserts that "secrecy is necessarily rhetorical phenomenon" because it denotes a method of concealment.[51] Rhetorical secrecy clarifies the tension between concealment and disclosure in shaping democracy as a relationship between social actors engaging with secrecy.[52] Pantsuit Nation operated within this framework of understanding, seen in the attempt to maintain a "secret" Facebook group, but Clinton's textual winks and the media acknowledgement of the group's existence demonstrate Pantsuit Nation itself was not the "secret." Dean claims that the Internet has dismantled the traditional concept of secret, and instead we ourselves have become the secret. She explains, "[w]hen we are the content of databases, when our numericized and digitalized identities provide the content that circulates, the content that might momentarily interest or stimulate a stranger thousands of miles away, we become secrets."[53] Similarly, the strategic move the Pussyhat Project made from a small group at a local knitting shop to a public, online, social media initiative demonstrates how the divulging of a secret, like membership to a group, generates a political collective that then can engage in civic processes.

In our contemporary moment, publicity and transparency function as a currency for social capital. Organizations often effect change or social influence by divulging secrets.[54] In the digital age, "democracy demands publicity" because transparency serves as the social capital cost

expected for full engagement in democratic society.[55] The relationship between publicity and secrecy establish a matrix of "what can be seen, imagined, practiced and understood as democracy."[56] Therefore, in regards to the work of social movements, this relationship must be interrogated to understand how groups collectivize in private but then shift to the public democratic political sphere.

In my analysis, I read these texts through the lens of rhetorical secrecy, to illuminate the value in each collective's transition from privacy to publicity. For Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project, their expenditure of secrecy to the broader public was key to legitimating their members in the political sphere. This tactical move, vital for political survival in the U.S. political climate, merits further scholastic investigation. Because of this analysis, I propose an extension of Richard Gregg's initial conception of ego-function that accounts for process, which I term the *ego-function of rhetorical publicity*.

Ultimately, this thesis analyzes how women strategically appropriated traditional rhetorical tactics of consciousness raising within online or digital communities such as Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project. This analysis leads to three major claims. First, I argue that ego-function is a necessary tool for survival for social movement groups to create collectives of resistance. Second, I suggest that the transition from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity is necessary for social movement groups to orient themselves as political actors in American democracy. Finally, I contend that digital technologies have changed the scope and power structures around the rhetorical tactics for collectives to express themselves through resistance. By interrogating the role ego-function played in these collectives individually and shifting their focus from private communities to the public political sphere, I nuance feminist understandings of how digital medias might impact embodied protest. Illuminating the transitionary processes

through which these women oriented themselves as legitimate political subjects points to deeper understandings of modes of resistance against the power structures within U.S. political society.

Preview of Chapters

This thesis is organized into two analysis chapters and a conclusion. My second chapter interrogates how Pantsuit Nation's location as a secret group, experiencing grief in the wake of Trump's election, led to a transition from rhetorical secrecy to rhetorical publicity as an organized social movement. In chapter three, I argue that the emotional pain from Trump's sexualized rhetoric and election ignited the support behind the Pussyhat Project, a move that pitted knitters and wearers of the pussyhats against the hegemonic structures Trump embodies. In my conclusion, I reassert that the transitional process from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity allowed women's social movement groups to (re)orient themselves as political actors in American democracy. Finally, I expand on opportunities for future scholarship on the direct interplay between digital communities and the role their strategic publicity plays in the expression of embodied protest.

CHAPTER TWO: MORE THAN A FEELING: EGO FUNCTION IN DIGITAL COMMUNITY

Libby Chamberlain, a graduate of Yale and a mother of two, passionately supported Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential campaign. Sensing a lack of political unity amongst Democratic supporters, Chamberlain desired solidarity for women traveling to the polls. During the third debate, Hillary Clinton wore a white pantsuit, invoking both suffragist history and her own well-established political career symbol despite various critiques over the years for its unfashionable appearance.[57] This outfit inspired Chamberlain to encourage others to wear pantsuits when casting their vote in the upcoming election. Turning to Facebook, Chamberlain created a private, secret group in October 2016 dubbed “Pantsuit Nation.” The irony of rallying under the pantsuit icon inspired Chamberlain and clearly resonated with others as the private Facebook group exploded in popularity, gaining more than twenty thousand members in a day.[58] Friends invited friends to join this digital space where “they didn’t have to hide their excitement or temper their enthusiasm” for Clinton’s presidential bid.[59]

During the campaign season, Pantsuit Nation functioned as a community for real, very human, support, to express hope and encouragement safely guarded from toxic, hegemonic political culture. According to the *Washington Post*, “Clinton’s opponents call her online supporters ‘Hillbots,’ a term that implies that their very existence is institutionalized, less than genuine and human.”[60] The secrecy and privacy offered to Pantsuit Nation’s members intentionally protected them from “internet trolls” and other negative influences. Leading up to the election, reporters wrote about how the “secret” group provided a community to rally Clinton supporters and anti-Trumpists.[61] By election night, more than 3 million people had pledged their allegiance to Pantsuit Nation.[62]

For a "secret" group, Pantsuit Nation certainly captured sufficient media buzz and even attention from Clinton herself.[63] Then, on November 8, 2016, Donald J. Trump received the electoral votes necessary to secure the presidency, seemingly dooming Pantsuit Nation's community buzz to a permanent muting. Chamberlain acknowledged "our collective hopes were dashed" when Trump walked away with the electoral victory.[64] However, the emotional setback from Clinton's electoral defeat did not quell the group's building momentum. Instead, it ignited a new purpose for Pantsuit Nation.

Post-election, Pantsuit Nation became a community for a social movement that demanded to go public with embodied resistive action.[65] The grief from Trump's election led to calls for a protest demonstration in response to his inauguration. In the weeks leading up to Trump's inauguration, Pantsuit Nation transitioned from a private, self-focused online community to a mobilized public collective, orienting itself within the contemporary American political sphere. As an expansive online community, Pantsuit Nation impacted the organizational and resistive potential of embodied protest in its participation with the 2017 Women's March. Pantsuit Nation's participation in the 2017 Women's March also challenged the group to strategically pivot and (re)orient themselves as a political collective.

In this chapter, I argue Trump's election acted as an ego-functional catalyst, motivating Pantsuit Nation members to move from its site of digital privacy to a strategically public embodied resistance. To support this claim, I investigate how the emotional response to Trump's campaign and victory incited Pantsuit Nation's deployment of specific rhetorical strategies, symbolic reversal and consciousness raising, to create a collective identity. Its subsequent transition from a secret online Facebook group to the strategic publicity of protesting with the 2017 Women's March on Washington demonstrates how collectives (re)orient themselves to

engage in broader democratic action. I utilize the published *Pantsuit Nation* book and a sample of five strategically selected news sources to interrogate how the group articulated itself and its involvement in the Women's March. In selecting my supporting texts, I chose relevant articles from a diversity of journalistic news sources: *CNN*, *Fox News*, *The Root*, *New York Times, Wall Street Journal,* and *Washington Post*. I wanted to embrace a variety of perspectives along the political spectrum. Additionally, I included the online new source, *The Root*, to prevent my sole reliance on news outlets that largely reflected hegemonic whiteness. The articles used were published within the timeframe of October 2016 to June 2017. This collection represents a variety of political perspectives and directs this study to discourses within the timeframe most relevant to the 2016 presidential campaign, the Women's March on Washington and the subsequent responses to the protest.

In this chapter, I analyze how Pantsuit Nation transitioned from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity. To do this, I first consider two rhetorical tactics the group utilized to create a collective and examine the roles rhetorical secrecy and strategic publicity played in the group's survival within the public political sphere. Second, I analyze the role ego-function played in Pantsuit Nation's utilization of strategic publicity as an organized social movement. Finally, I argue that this transition from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity allowed Pantsuit Nation to orient themselves as legitimated political subjects within American democracy.

Becoming A Tactical Pantsuit Nation

As a secret Facebook group, Pantsuit Nation initially worked to shield its members from negative online trolls and cultivate a consciousness raising enterprise in a protected environment.

A private and secret Facebook group functions as an invite-only digital collective. Membership is not public. Anyone reading a Pantsuit Nation member's Facebook profile would have no way of knowing that individual participates in the group unless the viewer was also a Pantsuit Nation member. To join Pantsuit Nation, a person must be invited and then apply for membership approval by one of the designated group moderators. Only then is an individual privy to posts made by individual members, events, and other user created content found in the secret group. This format of secrecy and group's curation lends itself to a consciousness raising enterprise, where users created, consumed and shared content based on their personal experiences across the Facebook site, with minimal oversight from a team of moderators.

When discussing how collectives enact political protest in the contemporary public sphere, I consider which structures of power the collective engages with in discourse. Therefore, in addition to social movement rhetorical strategies and rhetorical secrecy, I must account for the role of technology and mass media in altering public discourse. Habermas's conception of the public/private divide necessitated face-to-face interaction, severely limiting who had access to engage with these spheres.[66] Karma Chávez argues that spaces of withdrawal are necessary parts of social movement activities, "regardless of the level of oppression or crisis that the groups face."[67] For Pantsuit Nation, the participants engaged with the public sphere through their dissent, socially locating themselves against the power of the state, embodied by Trump. However, the reaction to public expressions of dissent also confronted Pantsuit Nation with the need to further orient itself as a digital and embodied political collective.

The very origins of the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group itself, the central hub for the organization's communications and membership, emerged in the wake of ego-deprivation experienced during the 2016 presidential campaign's third town hall debate. Chamberlain

explains her rationale for taking up the pantsuit as an emblem emerging from her frustration with the targeting of Clinton's fashion choice in political conversations: "It was less than two weeks after a video had surfaced of the Republican nominee [Trump] bragging about sexual assault, and yet the conversation turned, as it had so often in the months leading up to that debate, to Secretary Clinton's clothing."[68] Chamberlain's choice to reverse the symbolic pantsuit was a response to the critique Clinton's appearance, juxtaposed with the blatant disregard for Trump's horrific remarks. Together, the critiques of Clinton's appearance and Trump's blatant refusal to acknowledge his atrocious conduct inspired Chamberlain to use the pantsuit as her group's emblem.

Chamberlain created the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group the day after the debate, uploading a photo of Hillary Clinton in her white pantsuit from the previous night with the message, "Wear a pantsuit on November 8—you know why."[69] Uniting under the symbolic clothing used to attack Clinton clearly resonated with others as the private Facebook group went viral, expanding by thousands of members overnight. Chamberlain states, "I knew that more than any other campaign pin, slogan or logo, the pantsuit symbolized this moment in history, and I wanted to wear that symbol—to embrace it and embody it and celebrated it… It turns out I wasn't the only one."[70] The explosive growth of Pantsuit Nation, which surpassed one million members just days before the election, points to the resonance of the reversal of this symbol. Pantsuit Nation participants took up the icon and on November 8, 2016, over 120,000 members posted to the Facebook page, including tens of thousands of pantsuit and voting selfies.[71] The critique of female political candidates' fashion is not a new phenomenon.[72] The focus on female candidate clothing demonstrates the hegemonic standards of the U.S. political system by emphasizing a woman's appearance over her actual

qualifications. Hegemonic standards also explain Trump's ability to brag about sexual assault and emerge politically unscathed. The emotional impact of this structural power on the members of Pantsuit Nation is apparent in the group's discourse. Ego-deprivation also led Chamberlain to organize this secret Facebook group as a way to provide a collective space for individuals experiencing grief after Trump's election. The symbolic reversal of the pantsuit invited those who experienced this grief to identify with the collective and participate within the Facebook group. In reversing the pantsuit from a political insult to a sign of solidarity, Chamberlain crafted an expression of dissent to unify a movement.

After Clinton's electoral defeat, the Pantsuit Nation collective experienced further emotional frustration that merited response. For a "secret" group, Pantsuit Nation certainly captured sufficient media buzz and even acknowledgement from Clinton herself in her reference to the supportive "secret private Facebook sites" in her concession speech. During the presidential campaign, Pantsuit Nation functioned as a place to express hope and encouragement. Post-election, however, it became a place for commiseration, solidarity, and a burgeoning resistance.[73] In the official Pantsuit Nation book, the posts have been duplicated (with the original creators' permission) to capture how Pantsuit Nation facilitated these conversations.[74] By contextualizing these published contributions with the media's understanding of Pantsuit Nation, I illustrate how the group transformed through its ego-functional processes of transitioning from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity. Through the affordance of protection offered by a private site, the Pantsuit Nation community cultivated a culture of sharing and collective enterprise within the group. Evidence for this can be seen in the wide variety of members who contributed posts prior to election night.

Leading up to the election, the members of Pantsuit Nation posted to embolden one another in their support of Hillary Clinton as a candidate.

Claudia Holzbauer, a Peruvian immigrant, shared how she was inspired to apply for citizenship after Trump's "sad episode of "they steal our jobs…" and proudly used her new citizen status to vote for Clinton.[75] Jonathan, a white Texas ranch owner, posted his support, stating, "I've been a staunch Hillary Clinton supporter since she fought for health care reform the first time she was in the White House… [s]o yes, from a ranch owner from Texas, I'm with her!"[76] Both of their statements in support of Clinton demonstrate the group's initial function, identified by *CNN* as "a safe space where they can go gaga for Clinton without having to check their language for fear of inviting unwanted political debate, critiques or worse."[77] The protected nature of the Facebook group facilitated this shared enthusiasm prior to election night, but that only illustrates part of the function of Pantsuit Nation.

In addition to support for Clinton, other members shared personal stories and anecdotes from their lives within American political culture. R.E. Nauman, a Navy veteran from the 1960's explained, "My "pantsuit" was the uniform I wore for three years serving my country. I've been wearing an invisible pantsuit my whole life."[78] Kristen, an African American woman and a devout Christian wrote a lengthy post explaining why she had to condemn Trump's politics:

> Black people were considered property, and were barely even considered humans, until 1865. I am voting for a candidate that understands my value to society and to the world… As a Christian, I will *not* vote for a homophobic, xenophobic, misogynistic, nationalistic, racist bigot who is *incapable* of bringing people together, *refuses* to work across party lines, and does not understand that you do not lead by inciting violence and perpetuating fear.[79]

CNN reported that "many posts come from women -- and some men -- who feel isolated among Trump-supporting friends, families and neighbors. They don't feel comfortable talking politics on their Facebook feed, so they turn to the group."[80] The accessibility and privacy offered through the secret Facebook page offered the Pantsuit Nation community a site to share across a variety of experiences in ways members felt prohibited from elsewhere in their public lives.

Members shared their support for Clinton and their excitement to vote for a her as the presidential candidate while also dissenting against Trump. Before November 8, 2016, the group used consciousness raising to encourage one another with their experiences and reach across geographic limitations to rally millions of members to hit the polls. Ego-function does illuminate one of the reasons why this consciousness raising takes place, seen in Claudia Holzbauer's testimony of how Trump's insults towards immigrants inspired her to apply for citizenship and then share her voting experience with Pantsuit Nation. The act of writing and sharing her experience to the group is an ego-affirming act of consciousness raising, effectively allowing Claudia to identify herself as a political subject after feeling de-legitimated by Trump's comments.

Naturally, the nature of the role of consciousness raising changed significantly after Trump was declared the victor in the 2016 presidential election. The day after the election, Libby Chamberlain wrote the group:

> Today has been hard… instead of excitement and relief, I have been mired in disbelief, sadness, fear and heartache for much of the day… This group—our shared positivity and love and strength— has made a difference these last three weeks. And this is just the beginning. Pantsuit Nation is *more* important today than it was yesterday. Secretary Clinton called on us in her incredible, gracious speech this morning. We need to make our voices heard.[81]

Chamberlain's address to the group hallmarks a change in the role of Pantsuit Nation going forward and how consciousness raising would operate within the group. Pre-election, consciousness raising allowed individuals to ego-affirm their identities within a collective concerned with encouraging support of Clinton. Post-election, the consciousness raising efforts focused on ego-functional reactions to the election results, provoking Pantsuit nation's transition to a collective engaged with public, embodied, political resistance.

This transition is seen in the language shared in the content posted by the members after the election. Elisabet, a Latina woman, shared a story from her childhood wherein another child yelled "Go back to Mexico where you belong!" at the playground. "I share my story, to be vulnerable, and maybe let someone else know they are not alone. I'm fired up the an advocate for you all."[82] Bethany, a transwoman living in Missouri, responded to Trump's election emboldening hate against the LGBTQIA population in her hometown, saying, "We're going to fight this wave of anger and hate not with more anger and hate but with good deeds and standing up proudly."[83] Both of these women identify how Trump's election reiterated harmful hegemonic discourses in their own personal lived experience. Sharing their personal testimonies performs consciousness raising through identifying experiences that others within Pantsuit Nation can relate to and develop empathy towards. These examples of consciousness raising also point towards the community's push for resistance in the development of embodied action through advocacy and embodied deeds. Within the protection of rhetorical secrecy, the members could safely explore this idea of resistance. Likewise, writing their experiences performs ego-function by reaffirming their own value as an individual political subject and legitimating their lived experiences.

Other group members identified the ways Trump's victory impacted their perceptions of self within the group and the need for further resistive action. Sarah, a survivor and advocate for survivors of sexual assault, posted a picture from a survivor awareness campaign she participated in with her university. Accompanying the photo, she explained her emotional response to the election, "[t]he hardest part of the election for many of us is the outright acceptance of sexual assault. For me, it wasn't my rapist who caused me the most grief and pain. While the physical pain he inflicted on me was unforgivable, the true emotional toll was the silence of those around us."[84] For Sarah, the ego-deprivation and pain from Trump's horrific comments about women, and the nation's acceptance of his conduct, significantly impacted her life and the community she served. Speaking out within the private Facebook group performed important ego-functional work by validating her experience and articulated the danger of silence to the Pantsuit Nation community.

Internal challenges from within the Pantsuit Nation community reveal ways the group embodied a more intersectional consciousness raising effort than previous feminist organizations. One of the clearest examples of this nuanced consciousness raising comes from Talamieka, a black mother who challenged the group internally as well as the broader external political discourses. She writes:

> I'm trying to move forward past the looming presidency of a racist narcissist *you*, my fellow Americans, looked past his hatred and divisiveness and lack of common human decency… I need you to not only denounce but be active in opposition. This was your vote, it is now your responsibility. The same narrative that threatens my child and American citizens considered "other" by this presidency and validated by your vote has systematically torn societies apart. It takes a village for all our children, I will fight like hell for mine. If you care about country, our future, you will do the same.[85]

Considering roughly 53% of white women voted for Trump, her anger and call to action spoke powerfully to a group initiated by white women in support of a white woman's presidential

campaign.[86] The betrayal and fear conveyed in Talamieka's post reflects the experiences of others within Pantsuit Nation—and the nation as a whole. By sharing her personal experience with the group, Talamieka continued the process of consciousness raising within broader online community.

Within Pantsuit Nation, the members responded to these consciousness raising efforts in two significant ways. First, many members interpreted the election results as a sign that in order to change the government, they needed to work directly within the government system. For example, Brianna Wu, CEO of a gaming software company, identified how Trump's rhetoric about women was horrifying and disturbingly similar to the discourses in her own field of work, making the silence from the men in her industry even more terrifying. "Nothing changed until brave women stood up and fought back— often at extreme cost," she noted. In this post-Trump America, she continued, "That's why I'm strongly considering running for the legislature during 2018."[87] Wu was not the only Pantsuit Nation member to run for office in 2018. In fact, the group established a special tag for content posts that designated individuals as political candidates running at the local, state, and federal levels during the 2018 election cycle. Wu also serves as an example of the important ego-function work within this type of embodied action. After she felt de-legitimated as a political subject by Trump's hegemonic rhetoric, Wu established herself as a political candidate, legitimating her as an actor within the political system.[88]

Second, in addition to participation within the political system, members pushed towards a more immediate, public, resistive action. Initially, the group's consciousness raising worked towards supporting Clinton's presidential bid. Post-election, however, the shared grief generated a collective push for embodied, public action. The ego-deprivation

from Trump's election led to a mounting momentum for a protest demonstration in response to Trump's inauguration. In the weeks after the election, it became clear that many Pantsuit Nation members planned to march in the streets in an act of defiance against the newly inaugurated president. Chamberlain notes that, similar to the original encouragement to wear pantsuits to the polls, members posted pictures and content promoting their protest plans. Chamberlain describes the collective behind this shared cultivation of resistance as "[c]ollected voices. Strength in numbers. Intersecting identities."[89] The painful ego-deprivation experienced by participants post-election redefined the function of Pantsuit Nation and pushed the group to publicly engage in the political sphere.

Initially uniting under the reversed symbol of the pantsuit, Pantsuit Nation developed as a collective by individuals emotionally impacted by the 2016 presidential campaign. During the campaign and subsequent emotional fallout from Clinton's defeat, Pantsuit Nation's secret site afforded consciousness raising, allowing the group to perform important ego-affirmation work for its members. By orienting themselves as legitimated public actors in this online space, the group then moved to embodied, resistive public action. In the weeks leading up to Trump's inauguration, consciousness raising worked internally within the group to develop a reinforced collective identity and subsequently initiated a move towards public political dissent. Having established how the group used reversed symbolism and consciousness raising within a private digital context to create a collective identity, I now transition to analyzing how the collective's internal push for strategic publicity allowed the group to shift to a political collective engaged with public, embodied dissent.

Going Public or the Ego-Function of Rhetorical Publicity

The idea that Pantsuit Nation transitioned from a community of privacy and self-focus to a mobilized public collective is demonstrated through the language change and the calls to action in the posts shared by members. In the introduction of the Pantsuit Nation book, Chamberlain clearly addresses the shift demonstrating the motivation for Pantsuit Nation's members to go public: "Pantsuit Nation has become a community of diverse voices allied in resistance, grief, and hope. In the months after the election it has taken on a life beyond Facebook as we launched our website, founded our nonprofits to further the mission of the group, and of course, collaborated on this book."[90]

This internal push from within the group, identified by Chamberlain, motivated the group to publicly divulge the previously private discourses within the group. The group's cultivation in a secret site afforded them a type of consciousness raising and collectivizing that, through strategic disclosure, then transitioned to political social currency. Divulging their rhetorical secrecy through strategic publicity legitimated Pantsuit Nation as a public collective and its individuals as political actors. This legitimization then afforded the organization the opportunity to engage in embodied protest as a defined political force within the public sphere. Additionally, the role ego-function plays in dissent, as well as (re)defining a collective's identity is demonstrated in Pantsuit Nation's three strategic choices in its move towards from rhetorical secrecy to an embodied publicity. First, the collective established itself as a non-profit company to legitimate Pantsuit Nation's presence as a cohesive actor in the social and political spheres within U.S. democracy. Second, having established itself as a non-profit, Pantsuit Nation chose to strategically disclose itself to the broader public through publishing 250 narratives that had been shared internally within the site by releasing an official book

publication. Making these private discourses public performed an act of strategic publicity that divulged the "secret" of Pantsuit Nation, to the broader U.S. public. Third, within the group's own discourse and citied political activity, Pantsuit Nation engaged as an organizational force within the 2017 Women's March on Washington. This engagement with the 2017 Women's March also led the group to orient and then (re)orient themselves as a political collective. Therefore, it is important to specifically analyze how each of these strategic moves towards publicity functioned both internally within the group and externally within the broader social movement.

Establishing a Legitimated Pantsuit Nation

Mainstream media reporting on Pantsuit Nation and its role in the campaign focused on its large size and how group members displayed their enthusiasm for Clinton. *CNN* described the collective as constituted by "[m]embers . . . from swing states, red states and blue states" who "share[ed] a devotion to the first woman candidate, expressed in heartfelt and often soul-bearing posts."[91] At the time of the *CNN* article, the rapidly growing group was focusing on promoting a large presence at the polls. *CNN* described how Pantsuit Nation "ballooned to more than 1.3 million members, evolving from a safe space into an organizing group whose members spent the weekend before the election fund-raising and canvassing -- and looking for pantsuits."[92] Similarly, the *Washington Post* praised the group for its "secrecy" and active user base. "In just 17 days of existence, the 'secret' Facebook group has become the sudden online home of passionate Clinton enthusiasts. Yes, they exist, and so far, there are more than 1.9 million people in the invite-only space."[93] These news reports indicate the public perception of how Pantsuit Nation functioned as a collective and how the internal consciousness raising and

reversed symbolism led those experiencing emotional frustration during 2016 presidential campaign to pledge membership under the protection of the secret Facebook group site.

Post-election, the group pivoted to a movement for resistance. However, news outlets questioned who this "resistance" was really supporting. *The Root* depicted Pantsuit Nation as a bastion of white liberalism when they summarized the 2016 election as, "[w]hite liberal women in particular really had a rough go of it, what with Pantsuit Nation and the ghost of Susan B. Anthony failing to bring it home for Hillary Rodham Clinton."[94] More broadly reacting to the women's movement post-election, other various news sources critiqued the overall lack of intersectionality within the movement's discourses and community action, particularly after the 2017 Women's March on Washington.[95] Contributions from the women of color within Pantsuit Nation, such as the several I featured previously, are ignored in these critiques due to the private nature of the Facebook site. However, considering Pantsuit Nation had not published their book, thus divulging their internal discourse, and partnered directly with the Pussyhat Project initiative to help distribute the controversial pink "pussyhats" for the 2017 Women's March, this perception of white liberalism is fitting. It was this initial public positioning that rightfully caught Pantsuit Nation in the crossfire of such critiques.[96] The group's initial moves towards publicity were perceived as the group orienting itself as a collective, encouraging an exclusively white woman's social movement. However, it is clear Pantsuit Nation strategically chose to (re)orient themselves as a diverse, intersectional collective, particularly *after* the reception of the 2017 Women's March on Washington.

The Strategic Publicity of Publishing

While the Pantsuit Nation book was published after the 2017 Women's March on Washington, the process of collecting and editing the stories began much earlier and the decision was incredibly controversial. Announced in December of 2016, much of the press around Pantsuit Nation focused on the reactions both internally and externally to the book deal. *Fox News* described the reaction from within the Pantsuit Nation community as a "revolt," citing accusations that Libby Chamberlain was selling out the organization. "Libby you should be ashamed," wrote a Pantsuit Nation member named Jamie Bryant, who described herself on Twitter as a "radical feminist bitch." She continued, "This is a disgusting betrayal of trust and using others' stories to make money and gain fame."[97] *Fox*'s coverage demonstrates how this expenditure of secrecy was perceived not only as a social capital gain, but a financial gain. The *New York Times* also covered the controversy, acknowledging that Chamberlain's initial announcement drew swift backlash:

> [F]rom some of the page's members, who derided the deal as a betrayal of the group's primary function as a private place for people to share personal stories. Many commenters asked whether people whose stories appeared in the book would be compensated, and how the profits would be spent. Some accused Ms. Chamberlain of crass profiteering.[98]

It is clear from these quotes that members within Pantsuit Nation were concerned that their shared experiences would be divulged for the personal gain of a select few, not the broader collective.

The way the official Pantsuit Nation organization discusses the book signals the organization's attempt to respond to these critiques. On the group's website, the all the content produced by Pantsuit Nation has its own promotional summary and advertisement. The language is very clearly written to address concerns about the monetary motivations of Pantsuit Nation. The book's summary states:

> A book of stories from Pantsuit Nation was published by Flatiron Books in May 2017. Over 250 Pantsuit Nation members contributed writing and photography to the book, which represents one of the most influential ways we have moved beyond a 'secret, private Facebook site' and ensure that the voices of our members are heard going forward... [r]evenue generated from the book and the podcast support the work of Pantsuit Nation.[99]

The non-profit organization acknowledges that this transition from secrecy should signal not a monetary gain but elevates the group's legitimacy as a social and political subject. This plays a role within publicity, but also in the group's ability to perform the ego-functional role of legitimizing itself as a collective and its individual members as participants in the political sphere.

Similarly, the visual construction of the book demonstrates the group's attempt to address the perceptions of Pantsuit Nation as a homogenous, white women's enterprise. The front cover of the book, part of the jacket designed by Keith Hayes and Lisa Amaroso, features nine individuals, one man and eight women. Of the eight women, six are women of color. Included within this group of women of color, one is shown living with visible disability, while another is in her hijab. This visual representation on the cover is clearly strategic, along with the proportion of stories included within the book. Of the 250 contributors, 51 identify as white women, 16 identify as white men and remaining contributors identify as either as women of color or chose to go unidentified. All but one of the written entries featured in the book were originally posted in Pantsuit Nation's Facebook group between October 25, 2016 and January 21, 2017, the day of the Women's March on Washington. The submission process to qualify for inclusion required the writers to submit their original posts for consideration and grant "full, enthusiastic permission for use" within the book.[100] It is apparent then, through the choice of what narratives to include, as well as the book's front cover design, Pantsuit Nation desired to publicize itself as not only a

political subject, but also as a counterhegemonic organization embracing a broad, inclusive community. This (re)orientation as a political collective is a response not only to the ego-deprivation from Trump's discourses, but also the critiques of the contemporary women's movement in the United States.

Pantsuit Nation as an Organizational Force

Although it is difficult to quantify the exact numbers of participation from Pantsuit Nation members in the Women's March on Washington and the sister marches around the world, it is clear from that the official organization wanted to be known as a public participant in resistance. Pantsuit Nation chose to publicize itself as a digital space that encourages embodied resistance and while many women's movement groups organized with the Women's March, Pantsuit Nation played a specifically public role. Several days before the 2017 Women's March on Washington, the *Washington Post* published an analysis of the upcoming march and its ties to various social movement groups, focusing on Pantsuit Nation. The author, political science scholar Lori Poloni-Staudinger, attempted to contextualize Pantsuit Nation within the broader women's movement in the United States.[101] Poloni-Staudinger primarily focused on the question, could Pantsuit Nation itself be considered a women's movement? She claimed, "We don't know where Pantsuit Nation-inspired groups will fall. Some groups appear to operate with a feminist ideology, while others seem to be focusing on countering Trump, with little mention of feminism.[102] This identified lack of unity is not a new phenomenon in the women's movements of America.[103] However, the article illustrates how Pantsuit Nation's collectivizing inspired other women's political groups. The synergy behind Pantsuit Nation's symbolic reversal and consciousness raising

allowed the group to successfully pivot from secrecy to publicity. Other organizations can now emulate this turn, with potentially monumental consequences on the trajectory of the women's movement.

This influence is acknowledged by Pantsuit Nation itself. The official Pantsuit Nation book features a multi-page spread with photos of members taken at various march locations around the world, including; Boston, Nashville, Belgrade, Nosara, Messila, Pristhina, Belfast, New York and Chicago.[104] The only text entry from the day of the Women's March demonstrations comes from Aylin, who marched in Los Angeles. She writes, "Just over three years after I became an American citizen, I marched in Los Angeles: as a woman, a native of Istanbul, Turkey, an immigrant with Muslim roots, a lesbian who came to America to live openly and freely in full human dignity."[105] This inclusion in the official book reaffirms how, as an organization, Pantsuit Nation continued to (re)orient itself in strategically public ways through its official content.

Prior to the day of the Women's March, Poloni-Staudinger claimed, "We can expect Pantsuit Nation-inspired movements to be successful if they avoid infighting and focus on grass-roots activism."[106] The critiques of racial, transphobic, and ableist exclusionary practices leveraged at the women's movement after the 2017 Women's March on Washington certainly made many of the organizing groups question how they could orient themselves as partners and embody a more inclusive agenda.[107] For its part, Pantsuit Nation made a few key choices as it identified and articulated itself as an organization publicly engaged with resistive change in the United States.

As an official non-profit organization, Pantsuit Nation describes offered this description of its mission: "Pantsuit Nation is committed to balancing online engagement with

in-person activism. With chapters across the country, we work to connect our members with opportunities to get involved in the political process and in their own communities."[108] They are an official partner with organizations including; Black Lives Matter, RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), Planned Parenthood, March for Science, and United We Dream, demonstrating an outreach to other political collectives engaging in resistance efforts against dominant hegemonic discourses.[109] The grief that initially collectivized the group led to important consciousness raising and the push for an embodied resistance. As a result, individual members and eventually the larger organization itself identified an oppressor and determined ways to engage in political dissent against that oppression within a broader political discourse.

Conclusion

The Pantsuit Nation book's content curation, the developed organizational identity as a political collective, and its engagement as an organizational force in the 2017 Women's March on Washington and beyond demonstrate how the group intentionally oriented and then (re)oriented itself to counteract critiques against the group and the broader women's movement. This initial collective self was constructed through the ego-functional work focused on supporting Hillary Clinton. After the 2016 presidential election, the group transitioned to an organizational force on behalf of 2017 Women's March on Washington. By transitioning from rhetorical secrecy to public resistance, the collective sought to strategically publicize an identity that embraced a wider resistance and liberation agenda. However, the subsequent critiques of the group and the women's movement as the whole challenged the Pantsuit Nation to (re)orient its ego-affirmation work and to focus on the

intense challenges of Trump's presidency. By cultivating itself as a collective embracing inclusive resistance, Pantsuit Nation strategically pivoted between privacy and publicity.

The well-established tension between secrecy and transparency (or publicity) within democracy has forced secret organizations to engage in strategic disclosure for the sake of organizational survival.[110] For Pantsuit Nation, its survival as a collective of legitimate political actors required a strategic move towards publicity. Through the process collectivizing as a secret Facebook organization and subsequently joining the public political collective on the National Mall on January 21, 2017, Pantsuit Nation performed the act of concealment and disclosure that Dean argues is necessary for democratic politics.[111]

The three transitionary moves from private to public discourse legitimated the individuals participating within Pantsuit Nation as political actors. Additionally, these moves reveal how the collective of Pantsuit Nation transformed its own identity articulation through (re)orienting itself as a political collective. Publicity performs ego-affirming work, and the expression of collective dissent against the Trump administration and presidency empowered the group to continue sustained efforts of resistance within a democracy. Jodi Dean argues that democracy can only exist through the strategic disclosure of secrets.[112] Pantsuit Nation's formation and then strategic publicization reaffirms that assertion. While private collectives can generate important discourses, the pressure to orient a group within the political sphere requires publicity, demonstrated in the group's three specific moves towards more public political engagement. The demonstration of the ego-function of publicity evidenced in the public revelation of the 2017 Women's March established key women's groups as political actors. Pantsuit Nation's public participation in the 2017 Women's March on Washington signaled a pivot towards strategic publicity, allowing the organization to (re)orient itself as a

collective engaged in the civic democratic process. Pantsuit Nation's intentional transition further emphasizes the role ego-function performs in challenging collectives to cultivate identities and engage in protest. Ego-function illuminates the through-line behind taking up certain reversed symbols, engaging in consciousness raising and then collectivization of the group into a unified identity. Through mediated technology, Pantsuit Nation understood itself as a collective of rhetorical secrecy. This type of private community, numbering in the millions but still "secret," is only afforded through a digital, private network that can span geographic and temporal barriers through thousands of interpersonal connections. Initially, Pantsuit Nation understood itself as a collective engaged in secret, political resistance, but through the spectacle of rhetorical publicity in embodied protest, legitimated itself and its members as subjects in the U.S. political sphere.

My analysis demonstrates how the rhetorical demands of ego-affirmation, as a process of ego-function, animated Pantsuit Nation's transition from a space of rhetorical secrecy to the strategic spectacle of publicity on the National Mall of Washington D.C. The initial ego-function of the reversed symbolism and consciousness raising used by Pantsuit Nation was publicly perceived to primarily affirm a specific subset of women, white women. Through its book publishing and networking, Pantsuit Nation (re)oriented itself as a more intersectional organizational force. Given the ever-increasing convergence of our digital and public spheres, understanding this animation serves the utmost importance as we look towards collectives engaged in the contemporary political moment ensure their survival and resistance.

CHAPTER THREE: A SEA OF PINK: THE PUSSYHAT PROJECT

Look at any picture from the National Mall on January 21, 2017. It is impossible to miss the sea of neon pink in front of the Capital building. The startling pink contrast against the dreary January sky, a visual beacon to any observer, emerged from a digitally based initiative, the Pussyhat Project. Images of the various marches on January 21, 2017, ranging from Washington D.C. to Tokyo, reveal how the pussyhats visually unified the protestors across various protest locations around the globe. The vibrant strategic publicity of the hats signified the wearers' dissent and tied millions of protestors together as allied political subjects across geographic locations and social contexts.[113]

The design, a knitted pink pair of cat ears, emerged in response to the horrifying recorded conversation between Trump and Billy Bush from a 2005 interview:

> **Trump**: Yeah, that's her. With the gold. I better use some Tic-Tacs, just in case I start kissing her. You know, I'm automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.
>
> **Bush**: Whatever you want.
>
> **Trump**: Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything.[114]

Trump's flagrant disregard for a woman's consent and perpetuation of harmful, sexist language exhibits a clear act of ego-deprivation for women in U.S. politics. A man who effectively bragged about sexual assault had been elected to the nation's highest political office.

The word "pussy" is part of a long lineage of gender-linked derogatory terms that are utilized to inflict harm on persons, particularly women. These terms have meaningful context within our American political culture. According to Deborah James, words like "cunt," "pussy,"

and “beef” are utilized to demean or reduce a person to a sex object. The use of sex and sexuality-based derogatory terms points to how women are “evaluated largely in terms of the extent to which they conform to the heterosexual male needs and desires.”[115] Additionally, sexualized discourse in the American political sphere has been a persistent theme in recent national elections. This discourse is used to discipline individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms or sex roles. Women who chose to inhabit the political sphere are immediately thrust into the societal expectation that demands women fulfill a submissive, nurturing role. In her analysis of the sexualization or “pornification” of both Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton in the 2008 presidential campaign, Karrin Vasby Anderson observed how pornified political discourse generates a narrative that effectively depicts and/or defends sexualized violence against women as pleasurable, natural, or deserved.[116] Considering President Trump’s flagrant use of the word “pussy” and the disturbing story in which it was relayed, I argue his rhetoric actively encouraged violence against women within the pornified political context in the United States. This rhetoric naturally resulted in a deeply affective ego-deprivation for many American women, resulting in a move towards ego-affirming publicity and protest.

The permissiveness of the American media and general population regarding Trump’s sexually violent language also gestured toward the psycho-social expectation that women are sex objects. This demeaning word impacted an entire section of the American population by reducing their collective identities to that of mere objects to be acted upon by a heterosexual male desire. This reduction of identity further establishes how women experienced ego-deprivation and as a result, sought to (re)orient themselves as legitimated political subjects in American democracy. I argue this ego-deprivation led to the symbolic reversal and consciousness raising that produced the Pussyhat Project, and the resulting pussyhats played a

significant ego-functional in (re)orienting individuals as political subjects in the 2017 Women's March on Washington.

Based on my own ethical commitments as a feminist scholar, I must acknowledge the complex and problematic issues posed by the pussyhats. While there is little published scholarship directly critiquing the Pussyhat Project, there is certainly ongoing work towards this end.[117] In popular media, the outcry from transgender and non-white communities has been clear and well founded.[118] The narrowness of the design perpetuates social structures entrenched in harm against specific communities. For many, the pink color of the hats excludes people of color and the hats' translation as a literal symbol of female anatomy engages in promoting Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism (TERF). The Pussyhat Project acknowledged these critiques when many feminist groups chose to abandon the symbol for the 2018 Women's March. Co-founder Jayna Zweiman authored this statement in response:

> There are some people who have felt invisible **because** of this project. Some have interpreted pink hats with cat ears as white women's vulvas. Not all women have pussies. Not all pussies are pink. Our intent was and always will be to support all women. We hear some of you saying that this symbol has made some women feel excluded. We hear you. We see you.[119]

For the purposes of this project, then, it is necessary to clarify why I chose to engage with the Pussyhat Project and the hats themselves, considering their arguably exclusionary nature. While problematic, the pussyhats are a visual icon that defined a crucial political moment in U.S. women's political engagement.[120] The creators desired a unified sign of solidarity, and despite the exclusionary design, the pussyhats endure as a legacy of collective political action. Additionally, considering this thesis interrogates how digital communities mobilized strategic publicity in ego-functional protest, it would be historical negligence on my part to exclude the pussyhats.

This chapter analyzes the Pussyhat Project's self-published blog and, similar to my Pantsuit Nation texts, a sample of news source articles that address the Pussyhat Project as a collective and its role in the 2017 Women's March. Mimicking my collection for Pantsuit Nation, my relevant articles come from the same online news and print periodical sources published within the equivalent timeframe. This chapter serves as a continuation of how political resistance within social movement strategies are transformed in our digitally mediated age. The following chapter examines how, as a collective enterprise, the Pussyhat Project utilized symbolic reversal and consciousness raising to not only establish itself as a collective but engage in an embodied democratic process. In response to the ego-deprivation resulting from Trump's election, the Pussyhat Project allied itself with other collective organizations to create a moment of culturally significant, ego-functional, strategic publicity. This transition, going from a private community to an online initiative engaged in strategic publicity, oriented Pussyhat Project participants as political subjects in the American democratic process.

The Value of a Knitted Pink Hat

The reasoning behind the initial conception of the pussyhats demonstrates the role symbolic reversal played with generating a collective through ego-function. After Trump's horrific comments came to light, many thought it would be the "nail in the coffin" of his presidential campaign.[121] This made his victory more acutely painful for women who experienced significant ego-deprivation from his sexually violent rhetoric. This emotional deprivation resulted in certain feminist activists promoting the reclamation of the word "pussy" and its use as a symbol of individual and collective political resistance.[122]

This movement directly inspired Krista Suh and Jayna Zweiman's initiative, the Pussyhat Project. They explain that, "The name Pussyhat was chosen in part as a protest against vulgar comments Donald Trump made about the freedom he felt to grab women's genitals, to de-stigmatize the word 'pussy' and transform it into one of empowerment, and to highlight the design of the hat's 'pussycat ears.'"[123] Additionally, Zweiman explains that the hats served two major purposes. First, "[t]his was a way to reclaim the word 'pussy' … as something that was feminine but very strong."[124] Second, she noted that the pussyhats act as "a symbol of solidarity and support for women's rights and political resistance."[125] The reversal of the symbolic meaning behind "pussy" sought to elevate the word and icon from its historically ego-deprivational use.

Similar to the resonance of Chamberlain's reversal of the pantsuit, the prolific nature of the pussyhats indicates that the symbol ego-affirmed a group of women who experienced ego-deprivation as a result of Trump's rhetoric and election. Specific participation numbers are unavailable, but the *Washington Post* reported more than five thousand hats were distributed around the National Mall on the day of the 2017 Women's March on Washington.[126] The *New York Times* reported an estimated 1.1 million hats were crowd sourced (meaning created by volunteers) for the day of the March.[127] That same *New York Times* article references the tradition of American women using fashion in protest. "For American women, clothing has always provided a means of visual resistance, beginning with those who believed in dress reform, or the right to wear pants, in the 1800s," wrote reporter Katie Rodgers. "At the 1963 March on Washington, hundreds of black women opted for denim, overalls and natural hair, resisting sartorial protocol and rejecting expectations."[128] These historical ties to fashion,

symbolic reversal and protest have been a long legacy of the historical women's liberation movement in American politics.

As such, the thousands of women who convened at the National Mall in January 2017 were not the first to symbolically reverse presidential rhetoric in their strategically public protests. Perhaps one of the greatest deployments of American women's movement rhetorical discourse was in the early 20th century National Women's Party (NWP) demonstrations. With negotiations and meetings with U.S. President Woodrow Wilson dead on arrival, the NWP determined that they would have to take their appeals out from private discourse with the president and into a public setting. Starting the morning of January 10, 1917, a delegation of women dressed in white stood silently before the gates to the White House with banners that read, "Mr. President, What Will You Do For Women's Suffrage[?]"[129]As Belinda A. Stillion Southard argues, the women of the NWP chose this specific protest tactic as a direct response to Woodrow Wilson's own rhetorical presidency. By reversing Wilson's question of what Americans could do for their country in a time of war, the NWP emphasized the hypocrisy of fighting for liberty overseas when citizens within the United States itself were disenfranchised. Despite their inability to function as fully enfranchised citizens, the women of the NWP exerted their agency by creating their own space on the national stage with symbolically reversed protest.[130] While the NWP were certainly not the first women's liberation group to employ fashion in political protest, their specific response of President Woodrow Wilson provides a significant historical example of women deploying symbolic reversal of presidential rhetoric to (re)orient themselves as political subjects.

The reversal of Donald Trump's own lewd statement into a striking, visual tool of demonstration gave the protestors agency to enact an embodied rhetorical message to be seen

and therefore heard as legitimated social actors.[131] This technique of harnessing the power of a reversed symbol is a key aspect in Campbell's definition of symbolic reversal. Effective symbolic reversals take something that is socially considered negative and transform it into a positive sign.[132] By taking Trump's negative use of the word "pussy" and elevating it to an ego-affirming display of both dissent and solidarity, protestors assumed control of the conversation regarding women's bodies and their political (and sexual) agency.

The deployment of a hat symbolizing female genitalia takes on additional rhetorical significance considering it was used in the protest of a public official elected through the Republican party's platform. The Republican party operates on a political agenda that pursues the limitation of birth control options and potentially defunding providers of women's health care.[133] It is no small coincidence that the pink shade recommended for knitting the "pussyhats" bears a striking similarity to the pink used by Planned Parenthood's advertising materials. Planned Parenthood, a national organization that provides women's health services, is a consistent target of Republican legislation for defunding.[134] In wearing Planned Parenthood-pink "pussyhats" the participants are simultaneously symbolically reversing Trump's rhetoric, as well as the Republican platform centered on controlling access to health options for women's bodies. Wearing the hat on the body confronts Republican policy makers, which now includes President Trump, with the symbol of what they harm through their legislative attempts. The embodied aspect of the symbol, a hat to be worn, further draws attention to the bodily agency denied by Trump through his comments and the Republican party's platform on women's health issues.

The conception and design of the pussyhats demonstrates a direct tie between the Pussyhat Project's initiative and the role of ego-function in political protest. Zweiman and Suh identify Trump's taped interview comments as a focal point for the inspiration behind re-

appropriating the word and symbol, “pussy,” to illuminate the hypersexualized, violent discourses around women in American politics. The intentional color choice of the hats and the choice to be worn on the body makes the reversed symbol of the pussyhats a reclamation of women’s bodily and political agency. The effectiveness of this reversed symbol came from its mass proliferation, a phenomenon of consciousness raising made possible through a private community transitioning to broader digital networks.

Building an Initiative: Consciousness Raising at Home and Across the Internet

Prior to the Women’s March, Krista Suh and Jayna Zweiman launched the Pussyhat Project to create a striking, collective visual statement for activists and to unite the demonstrators participating around the world.[135] For thousands of women to knit, distribute and don the hats, a massive consciousness raising enterprise occurred. The creation and proliferation of the pussyhats around the globe is evidence of the successful digital networking utilized the Pussyhat Project. In this section, I argue that the creation and the distribution of the pussyhats through the Pussyhat Project illustrates how consciousness raising enterprises, initiated as an ego-functional response, have transformed in our digital age. This transformation resulted in a meaningful moment for women’s liberation, where participants shed the protection of rhetorical secrecy for a tactic of strategic publicity to orient themselves as political subjects in American politics.

The Pussyhat Project began with a simple knitting club in Los Angeles. Co-founder Jayna Zweiman was recovering from a serious injury, limiting her ability to work or participate in physical activities. As part of her rehab, Zweiman took a crochet class at her local yarn store, the Little Knittery as part of her “creative healing modality.”[136] She found the activity and

community engaging and quickly recruited her friend, Krista Suh, to join the class. It was in these classes and subsequent knitting circles, times when knitters would come together to create in community, that Zweiman and Suh identified how consciousness raising inspired their initiative. As the official Pussyhat Project blog describes it, "During many lengthy conversations in knitting circles, the two women found common ground in their passion for women's rights and the inspiration they found in the pro-women's rights language of the pending Women's Marches."[137] By coming together and sharing experiences, Suh and Zweiman built a consciousness with each other and their fellow co-knitters, looking for ways to orient themselves as political subjects in light of Trump's election.

The idea to create the pussyhats emerged when Suh planned to attend the Women's March on Washington but Zweiman, due to her injury, could not attend any of the marches. Zweiman felt frustrated that her lack of physical presence prevented her from orienting herself as a political subject. Therefore, she "wanted to find a way to have her voice heard in absentia and somehow physically 'be' there."[138] Together, the two women conceived the idea of "a sea of pink hats at Women's Marches everywhere," a visual wave to make a bold statement of solidarity and activism, that would also "allow people who could not participate themselves – whether for medical, financial, or scheduling reasons — a visible way to demonstrate their support for women's rights."[139] They approached the owner of the The Knittery, Kat Coyle, to design a striking pattern that would be simple enough for knitters of all skill levels. With the design cemented, Zweiman and Suh determined they needed to transition from their insular, local community and utilize online networks and social media to activate the "close-knit" global knitting community to participate in their initiative. This transition from the local community of

The Knittery to a broader online network around the world is the first evidence of the pivot from a private discourse to one of strategic publicity.

This transition was necessary for the founders to fulfill their hopes of creating their sea of pink hats around the world. Their privately shared experiences built a limited rapport but transitioning to an online blog and social media presence allowed them to conduct consciousness raising with a broader audience. In a *CNN* interview written about the Pussyhat Project prior to the March, Coyle explained their thought process: "I designed a hat that was simple enough that beginners could make it, or modify it, and make it their own. We put together the website, and then I got on Instagram, let my knitting community know, and it just took off from there."[140] Launching shortly after Thanksgiving and using the hashtag, #PussyHatProject, the online collective got to work to produce the sea of pink in time for January 21, 2017. The Pussyhat Project website invited participants to create hats for other women in their local communities and social networks, and The Knittery served as the ground zero for hundreds of volunteers to drop off hats for marchers to pick up or mail out. The hats functioned as consciousness raising vehicles themselves as each volunteer was encouraged to include written messages to the marcher would receive the hat. These notes offered participants, other women and those who support women, the opportunity to understand more about experiences.

One example is representative of how this consciousness raising functioned within the larger community of Women's March participants. Eric Weiss, an advocate looking to acquire pussyhats for himself, his wife and his young daughters, went to The Knittery. There, he met knitting volunteer Makiko Ushiyama, who gifted him with a bundle of hats she had just finished. Inside each had, she placed a handwritten label, "This hat was made by Makiko in Los Angeles, California. A woman's issue I care about is that a woman's rights are human rights. I care about

them all. Thank you for marching."[141]While Weiss met Ushiyama in person, the personal labelling system afforded knitters to engage with consciousness raising efforts with marchers across geographic and temporal barriers. Eric and his daughters were just some of many of the marchers who took on the experiences, narratives and concerns of other marchers through their participation in the initiative. Using social media to encourage individuals to engage with the knitting community, Suh and Zweiman expanded the range of consciousness raising. Their move towards this strategic publicity model online broadened the audience size and reach across the world. While Zweiman and Suh founded the initiative, it was through the efforts of these activated organizations and communities that the hats proliferated, continuing the consciousness raising model relying on no single leader to sustain the efforts of the group.

The Pussyhat Project's recruitment of volunteer knitters demonstrates the effective deployment of a networked group structure.[142] Mommy and Me groups and the Red Hat Society, organizations not typically considered political entities, helped to promote the initiative nationally and internationally through retweeting the hashtag and creating thousands of hats.[143] *Fox News* published a story emphasizing the incredibly hybrid digital and physical nature of the volunteer recruitment for the Pussyhat Project. They named Ravelry, a social network for knitters and crocheters, as a major player in the recruitment for pussyhat makers and distributors.[144] The online networking tools offered through social media allowed the Pussyhat Project to activate different insular or private communities to engage with a broader political discourse.

In addition to these social media-based organizations, the Pussyhat Project allied itself with established online political groups like Pantsuit Nation. Pantsuit Nation is named on the official Pussyhat Project blog as a partner and distributor of the hats all around the world.[145]

Even when you look at many of the self-published materials from Pantsuit Nation itself, many of the images include participants wearing the iconic pink cat ears.[146] Digital technology facilitates the expansions of a single group's network. In the case of the Pussyhat Project and Pantsuit Nation, the formerly private collective's consciousness raising impacted the other collective's consciousness raising efforts. The transition from a private local community to a broader digital network allowed the Pussyhat Project to proliferate and engage with communities to which it would otherwise never had access. Understanding this pivot from privacy to publicity allows us to better understand the ways in which collectives engage with protest. These digitally based organizations found a value in the opportunity for an embodied demonstration offered by the Pussyhat Project's hats. Through the creation and distribution of the hats, the Pussyhat Project offered a strategic spectacle of publicity for other politically motivated groups concerned with women's liberation and invested in "going public." This tactic of strategic publicity, made possible through the utilization of consciousness raising and symbolic reversal, culminated in the 2017 Women's March on Washington.

The Ego-Functional Tide in a Sea of Pink

Looking at the photographs captured at the March on Washington and the sister marches around the globe, the neon pink pussyhats serve as visual beacons. The pussyhats are impossible to miss when looking at the photos and thus, arguably, do make the activists harder to ignore. Those wearing the hats are readily identified with specific political agendas set forth by the Pussyhat Project and the Women's March. The thousands of women wearing the hats at various protests around the globe identified themselves as political subjects on a national and international stage of publicity. In this section, I argue the deployment of the pussyhats on

January 21, 2017 performed ego-functional work, both affirming and depriving, that has lasting impact on the course of the women's liberation movement in the United States.

To illuminate how ego-function worked within the Women's March and the utilization of the pussyhats, first I must situate the political context of the embodied march itself. Focusing on the largest march, the Women's March on Washington, offers an important insight to how the Pussyhat Project integrated itself into a historically defining political moment in American politics. Locating the reversed symbol of the pussyhats on the National Mall offers valuable insight to the ego-functional work of the hats themselves. Over 400,000 women and supporters in convened on the National Mall to protest.[147] Around the world, millions of women and their supporters joined sister marches and demonstrations in solidarity—including a group of women scientists on the continent of Antarctica.[148] It was no accident that the March Committee chose to hold the main demonstration on the National Mall in Washington D.C. on the day after Donald Trump's inauguration. This well-recognized location not only links all three branches of U.S. government, but, as Sara Hayden demonstrates, it materially represents the active figure head of the U.S. government and even "…the government assumes the role of the Strict Father."[149] The president embodies paternalistic authority—an authority which, I argue, extends to and is embodied within the National Mall.

The National Mall is an established symbol as a paternal, hegemonic representation of the United States government. Given the temporal and spatial proximity to his inauguration, locating the 2017 Women's March on Washington on the National Mall extended that symbolism, generating material representation of Trump himself. Trump redefines the standards of presidentiality and the National Mall functions as a material and symbolic extension of Trump and his political platforms. On January 21, 2017, protestors flooded the green spaces and

sidewalks of the two-mile space in front of the United States Capitol to voice their dissent. Deploying the symbolic reversal of the “sea of pink” to publicly overwhelm the space, the protestors asserted their direct response to the rhetoric of President Trump by literally standing up to his material representation on the National Mall. To overwhelm the space in such a strategic spectacle of publicity affirms the participants as political subjects. The women who donned pink were physically taking back a space they felt ostracized from through Trump’s election to the presidency, in spite of his harmful rhetoric.

The visual effectiveness of this large-scale demonstration is highlighted in the contrast between two photographs taken by a webcam trained on the National Mall. One, taken the day of Trump’s inauguration, shows a seemingly thin crowd on the National Mall.[150] Various experts estimate that approximately 250,000 individuals showed up in attendance for Trump’s inauguration.[151]

Fig. 1, Trump’s Inauguration on the National Mall
(Photo courtesy of Slate)[152]

The second image shows the National Mall flooded with people the next day, awash in a sea of neon pink pussyhats, carrying handmade protest signs.

Fig. 2, The 2017 Women's March on the National Mall
(Photo courtesy of Slate)[153]

Between the two snapshots, it is apparent that the Women's March visually overwhelmed the National Mall in a way President Trump's own supporters failed to achieve. The spectacle of this public demonstration sought to (re)orient participants as political subjects through inhabiting the political sphere on a national stage. Defined by the vibrant pink color, the pussyhats heightened the dramatic difference between the crowd's presence in the two photographs, underscoring the March's power as a historic political moment. Symbolically, through the reversed symbol of the hats, participants in the Women's March overpowered and took control of the seat of American politics, even if they had failed to do that through the campaign for political office. This fulfills the goal of ego-affirmation within the process Gregg outlines, as the Pussyhat Project participants identified their oppressor and engaged in a visibly recognizable act of dissent on the national stage of American politics. Transitioning from the private, local collective to a public, online initiative afforded the Pussyhat Project the opportunity to disclose their political existence in a rhetorically powerful moment of dissent on the National Mall. The strategic publicity of an overwhelming pink wave oriented the participants as political subjects after experiencing the ego-deprivation perpetuated by Trump's rhetoric and visually confront the hegemonic structures he represents.

However, this ego-affirmation was not the only ego-functional work resulting from the deployment of the pink pussyhats. I argue that the hats served both affirming and depriving roles in ego-function, illustrating the complexity of a political protest defined by a reversed symbol generated through a consciousness raising effort. The Pussyhat Project illustrates Hayden's argument regarding pointing towards the potential values and dangers of consciousness raising. On one level, consciousness raising provided a visually striking outlet for activists to create hats, share experiences and engage in the Women's March movement despite economic, health or location barriers. On the other level, the structures that produced this consciousness raising cultivated a reversed symbol that left many women out of the conversation.

Both *The Root* and the *Wall Street Journal* discussed the exclusion of others and the complexities of attempting to unite such an all-encompassing movement, women's liberation, under a single symbol. In the *Wall Street Journal* article, the first element to come under fire was the plethora of competing messages produced in the March itself. The author laments, "[t]he marchers in Washington seemed to have a million messages."[154] According to the official Women's March webpage, the agenda for the March movement includes ending state violence, reproductive rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, immigrant rights, civil rights, disability rights, and environmental justice.[155] Even in more liberal outlets, such as the *Washington Post*, the multiplicity of the messages was addressed. As author Abigail Hauslohner describes it, the competing messages shared the key thematic of being decidedly anti-Trump:

> …demonstrators across the country hoisted signs in support of women's, immigrant and LGBTQ rights, Planned Parenthood, Black Lives Matter, wage equality and environmental protection — all causes that Trump has appeared to oppose. They protested against gun violence, bigotry, discrimination and sexual assault. They lambasted Trump's rhetoric and turned it against him.[156]

With so many issues enveloped in women's liberation, it is evident the messages with the most visible symbols dominated the conversation. Due to the heightened publicity of the pussyhats, the *Wall Street Journal* identified, "[o]ne big theme was reproductive rights… Many women carried signs depicting the female anatomy or wore crocheted pink cat ears—a pun on a vulgar term Mr. Trump once uttered."[157] The pussyhats presented a significant issue for many who felt it excluded marginalized communities through its design. Writing for *The Root*, Maiyasha Kai addressed this issue directly in a powerful editorial after the Women's March. "[A]s the "pussy hat"—a direct response to Trump's disgusting admissions of sexual assault—emerged as the march's symbol, several women of color expressed disdain for its being pink, viewing it as a symbol of whiteness rather than of femininity, since, like our skin, our genitalia tends to come in a variety of deeper hues."[158] Similarly, Kai and others expressed concerns that the hats facilitated the marches centering on the "notion of biological womanhood" which both ignores and perpetuates the social scripts that harm trans communities.[159] These harmful exclusions are a product, I argue, of the way in which the reversed symbol, the pussyhat, was created and distributed.

In the earlier sections, I detailed Zweiman and Suh's initial conception of the pussyhats and how they became so prolific. Zweiman and Suh's primary community at the beginning of the consciousness raising process was located at The Knittery. While I cannot authoritatively speak about the demographic makeup of the global knitting community in totality, there is evidence that the community involved with the Pussyhat Project was primarily white and female. Ravelry, the online social media site used to recruit many of the pussyhat knitters, published a collection of select demographic information regarding their member user base in 2014.[160] Primarily, Ravelry users are female identified and claim residency in the United States, Canada, Western

Europe and Scandinavia. As of January 2019, the entirety of the leadership team of Ravelry is white, as are most of the models used to promote new patterns and creations.[161] Out of the thousands of smaller social networking "groups" offered within Ravelry, at the time this chapter was written, only four groups claim to network women of color and the total membership across the four groups is less than two thousand. For context, the membership total for Ravelry is more than eight million. Therefore, it is fair to claim that the initial conceit of the pussyhats, done through consciousness raising within the knitting community, privileged a primarily white woman's experience. The structural context around this consciousness raising illustrates how the ego-functional work of the pussyhats was ego-affirming to those who felt represented but ego-deprivational to those who were excluded from the Pussyhat Project's scope from the beginning.

In an act of due diligence, I must note that Krista Suh does identify as a woman of color, something she has gone on to discuss publicly as she defends the initial conceit and deployment of the Pussyhat Project.[162] However, as Kai put it, "…while white womanhood may have appeared to be the face of the Women's March, the organizers' principles make it expressly clear that it was never intended to be so."[163] Whatever the intentions of the organizers of the March or contributors like Suh and Zweiman, once participants transitioned from the relatively private local communities to the strategic publicity of the Women's March on Washington, the ego-functional impact of the pussyhats and the March as a whole must be evaluated on the strategic publicity deployed and the responses generated from that protest demonstration.

The pussyhats, crafted as a reversed symbol to Trump's ego-deprivation, distributed and popularized through an exclusionary structure of consciousness raising, take on additional ego-functional work within the context of racial tensions within the Women's March community prior to the day of demonstrations in 2017. The *Wall Street Journal* chronicled an instance of

these tensions when ShiShi Rose, one of the social media administrators for the Women's March, wrote a post entitled "White Allies Read Below."[164] ShiShi stated, "no ally ever got very far without acknowledgment of their privilege daily" and informed white women that they "don't just get to join because you're scared too. I was born scared."[165] ShiShi's post received thousands of comments with responders claiming, "This makes me not want to go now," and "This is all for all women! Not just black, white but brown, Muslim etc," or most egregiously, "women were suppressed throughout history. This is an event about women banding together, not tearing each other apart because you're bitter."[166] The "all women" argument is rightfully rife with tension because the universalization of the female experience inherently privileges discourses of the dominant, not necessarily representative, voices within the movement.[167] These responses to ShiShi's post illustrate the tensions within the current Women's March movement. These tensions reveal, structurally, why an initiative like the Pussyhat Project inevitably led to an exclusionary symbol design. This structural issue that plagued the Pussyhat Project and the Women's March more broadly further heightened the ego-functional work of the pussyhats as an emblem of strategic publicity, both ego-affirming and ego-deprivational, within the context of the 2017 Women's March on Washington.

Conclusion

The simultaneous ego-affirming and ego-deprivational work of the pussyhats defined an historic moment within the of women's liberation movement in the United States and arguably around the globe. With the pussyhats enshrined in institutions like the Victoria and Albert Museum, the New York Historical Society and the Smithsonian collection, they endure as a material legacy of a political moment.[168] Importantly, however, the pussyhats have been

abandoned in subsequent Women's Marches due to the merited outcry over their exclusionary design.[169] This important trend of pushing for more thoughtful inclusion across the populations that identify with women's experiences in the United States has had direct impact on the Women's March movement since January 21, 2017. Particularly, many have questioned the overwhelming whiteness of the symbols and participation amongst the Women's Marches. In some cases, events have even been cancelled, citing "overwhelming whiteness" in communities where it was clear the residents were not being represented or included in the march events.[170]

These continuing tension points towards the importance of interrogating role ego-function plays within our political protests. Additionally, the Pussyhat Project serves as a meaningful case study for how technology has deeply impacted the proliferation and participation of consciousness raising enterprises, but it is still constrained by harmful structures of power. The strategic publicity deployed by the Pussyhat Project and its supporters strove to (re)orient a group of women who had been ego-deprived by Trump's election back into political subjectivity by disclosing themselves as embodied symbols on the National Mall. However, the structural challenges surrounding the consciousness raising that generated the design and proliferated the hats online around the world led to the pussyhats serving ego-affirming and ego-deprivational roles simultaneously. Interrogating our symbols and who they orient as political subjects through ego-function offers feminists important tools to critique and push for more inclusive protest practices. With liberation at stake, understanding who is granted the privilege of political subjectivity is of the utmost importance.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Through hegemonic discourse, women have been relegated to the private sphere throughout American history. Understanding the power behind a collective's transitionary process from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity significantly impacts how scholars study the ways in which women activists are collapsing the divisions between the private and public sphere to legitimate themselves as political actors. Within this conclusion, I expand on the ways this thesis not only contributes to our understandings of the theoretical frameworks around ego-function and feminist criticism, but our understanding of social movement rhetoric more broadly. I end with reflection on the long-term political consequences of this research and where subsequent scholarship will further develop these contributions.

Rhetorical Tactics in the Digital Age

Traditional rhetorical strategies of symbolic reversal and consciousness raising, first identified by Campbell, still offer valuable frameworks for analysis.[171] Despite the time between 1973 and 2017, these rhetorical tactics remain salient to social movement scholars today. Undoubtedly, the accessibility and proliferation of digital technology has transformed how social movements collectivize, communicate and distribute across geographical, temporal, and social barriers. However, as this thesis demonstrates, digital technologies also affect the structures that emerge from and surround these rhetorical tactics.

In the case of Pantsuit Nation, the privacy afforded through Facebook's secret site structure encouraged the collective to organize and engage in consciousness raising due to a sense of protection from the outside world. The unique ability for a "secret" Facebook site to simultaneously protect and connect over 3 million people afforded the potent resonance of

the reversed pantsuit symbol and illuminates the complexities of consciousness raising across such an expansive community.

For Pantsuit Nation, Chamberlain tapped into the rhetorical symbolism of Hillary Clinton's pantsuit, a fashion choice that was disparaged by many, and strategically deployed this emblem as a marker of group identity and political agency.[172] Unifying under a symbolic reversal has important implications for how Pantsuit Nation collectivized privately online and then transitioned to publicly engage with the 2017 Women's March on Washington.

Similarly, the rhetorical tactic of consciousness raising is complicated by interrogating the structures surrounding Pantsuit Nation. As Hayden demonstrated, the danger of a universalizing nature of consciousness raising is a reality that feminist social movements must confront.[173] Accounting for the structures surrounding Pantsuit Nation as a secret Facebook group which then shifted to a public collective, suggest avenues for analyzing how social movement organizations come to collectivize, pivot, and then engage in embodied, public dissent. Pantsuit Nation's deployment of symbolic reversal and consciousness raising in its transition from secrecy to publicity demonstrates an important link between the digital and public spheres in our digital American society. These rhetorical tactics, used within this digital network format, allowed Pantsuit Nation to cultivate an identity which it could then divulge as social capital through a move towards strategic publicity. This expenditure of social capital legitimated members as political actors, resulting in the group's ability to pivot towards strategic publicity, then (re)orient itself after the 2017 Women's March.

The Pussyhat Project engaged and profited from integrating digital technology within its initiative's rhetorical tactics through different means. While the organization began in a small, localized, private community and engaged in consciousness raising, the transition to a

social media community created a massive online initiative. Most importantly, the online structures surrounding the website Ravelry and the distribution of the pussyhats illuminates ways in which consciousness raising can create harmful exclusionary rhetorics due to structural constraints entrenched in white feminism. The culminating work of this consciousness raising, the reversed symbol of the pussyhat, now endures as a visual marker of the complex legacy of the 2017 Women's March on Washington.

The Values of Ego-function in Social Movements

In most literature involving ego-function, Gregg's original framework has traditionally been used to critique social movements or relegated to a small footnote of analysis. However, this thesis illuminates how Pantsuit Nation and the Pussyhat Project emerged from powerful, emotional responses to the 2016 presidential campaign and Donald Trump's election to the presidency. Therefore, it is of the utmost import that scholars do not discredit the powerful functions behind these emotional responses acting as catalysts for major social movement action.

For Pantsuit Nation, ego-deprivation inspired the group's initial collectivizing pre-election, ignited its transition from secrecy to publicity in the 2017 Women's March and incited its subsequent (re)orientation as a political collective. This strategic transition made by Pantsuit Nation also illustrates how women and those who identify with the Pantsuit Nation community experienced grief and subsequent anger at Trump's election, emotions which ignited its participation in the Women's March on Washington as an embodied display of dissent. Ego-function explains the ways in which a group defines itself and expresses itself in protest in ways that merit continued analysis. This thesis extends and nuances our understanding of

demonstrating ego-function as an important catalyst for the transition from rhetorical secrecy to publicity.

For the Pussyhat Project, responses to ego-deprivation launched the initiative that crafted the emblem of the 2017 Women's March movement, for better and for worse. Ego-function's role as a catalyst behind collectives transitioning from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity offer significant nuance to the role of ego-function in social movements, extending our understanding of how ego-function propels groups to collectivize and then orient themselves to ensure survival.

Furthermore, ego-function also illuminates the ways in which groups deploy traditional women's liberation tactics, like symbolic reversal and consciousness raising, to transition from rhetorical secrecy to strategic publicity. Understanding these powerful, elicited emotional responses demonstrates why the use of Facebook, the National Mall, and the pussyhats afforded key women's groups the political power to engage in legitimating expressions of protest. Additionally, ego-function considers how an artifact performs ego-affirming or ego-deprivational work, allowing scholars to more critically analyze how artifacts like the pussyhats perform these things simultaneously in their deployment. In the specific case of the pussyhats, ego-function based analysis nuances our understanding of how an item can be empowering to certain members within a movement, while excluding others.

This analysis demonstrates how the scholastic understanding of ego-function must be expanded from a method of critiquing social movements to a framework that identifies the instigations for significant embodied action. Similarly, applying a digitized feminist lens to the rhetorical tactics emerging from ego-functional responses within the structures of the digital age nuance our understanding of how rhetoric has evolved.

Marching Onward

As with any ongoing social movement, the work here is just beginning. Several weeks ago, I visited the Denver Public Library's Western History and Genealogy Archives collection to access their Women's March on Denver Collection. Pussyhats, signs, and handwritten testimonies from three years of local marches were collected in several oversized boxes. Three years of expressions of dissent, responses to the seemingly never-ending tide of ego-deprivation related to Trump, and the desire of legitimation in the political sphere contained in one small collection. The women's movement, struggling as it might, keeps marching on for the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is imperative to use this research as a foundation for new scholarship that further interrogates how digital structures and ego-functional responses continue to shape and transform protest within our political culture.

Using these tools of ego-function and digitized feminist criticism, future scholarship must investigate the power relations illuminated and even perpetuated through women's movement rhetoric. Through these types of analysis, we can better understand those being included and excluded from this movement, both physically and symbolically, and the broader effects these rhetorical tactics have on the contemporary women's movement. Keeping in mind the rightful critiques of the Pussyhat Project and Pantsuit Nation, it becomes apparent that the women's movement's survival depends on attending to these power disparities. Women's movements, if they are truly feminist, must be concerned with liberation for *all* peoples. As a scholar committed to producing feminist scholarship, I celebrate the hard work of the current feminist movement but must interrogate the ways we create and represent our collectives. I do this in the hopes that our conversations to create empowering and transformative knowledge with the goal of liberation for *everyone*.

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[65] Chamberlain, *Pantsuit Nation,* xvii. Studying an online Facebook group presents ethical and Institutional Review Board process implications. Given the fact my written appeals to Libby Chamberlain have gone unanswered, studying Pantsuit Nation must be done through the group's officially published texts. My hope is that, given more time, I can meet IRB's requests in some fashion and conduct an extension of this project using the content of the posts themselves.

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