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When Symbols Strike

The role of symbols and visual media for online activism, networks, and connection in the Women's Strike in Poland

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ABSTRACT

The case study in focus for this research is the Women's Strike in Poland movement during its articulation in late 2020. This movement was organized to campaign for reproductive rights and women's rights in Poland after a restrictive abortion law was proposed in 2016, put into motion in 2020, and passed in 2021. This is an example of a contemporary movement supporting body autonomy and gender equality, where historically substantial mobilizations were facilitated through online activism. The use of specific symbols like a lightning bolt within the visual media of the movement marks this case as distinctive in the study of activism.

This qualitative multi-method research uses visual analysis and interview methods to gather empirical data that contributes new research to the media and communication studies field by connecting the visual media and social movement disciplines. To support the research questions of the thesis, a semiotic visual analysis examined 5 symbols of the Women's Strike movement and 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The role of symbols and visual media in social movements were analyzed as being for: communicating the meaning of the movement and working to identify it; increasing visibility and spreading awareness of the movement through the circulation of symbols, mainly online; establishing networks of individuals within and outside of the movement; and building connections between participants of the movement because of shared values. The findings also addressed that participation through sharing symbols and visual media allowed for greater possibilities of communication about the movement between individuals. This research uses the Women's Strike in Poland as a case to explore how symbols and visual media work through online activism to build networks and connections between individuals, and ultimately to further the opportunity for societal transformation.

Key words: *visuals, symbols, visual media, social movements, online activism, networks, connection, reproductive rights, feminism, solidarity, Women's Strike, Poland*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The study of visual media within the media and communications discipline is an emergent area of research due to the developing digital technologies that advance our society. Today, "new technologies favor images over words" and "take advantage of the synthesizing power of images" to capture attention and enable the spread of information (della Porta, 2013:138-139). In his work *Theorizing Media: Power, Form and Subjectivity*, Corner writes that "in the work on media from Social Science perspectives, the relative neglect of formal questions (including questions of aesthetic organisation) is a 'blind spot', and the possibilities for greater cross-disciplinary awareness and contribution here are strong" (Corner, 2011:2). Specifically, formal questions concerning visuals arise.

The exploration of visual media in relation to social movements is one area that is increasingly gaining interest (Doerr et al., 2013; McGarry et al., 2020). Technology allows greater possibilities for communication, and regarding social movements, the internet and social media platforms become "both its organizational form and its mode of action" (Castells, 2009:338). Organizers and participants of social movements use online platforms to communicate information and spread awareness about movements through visual media. Visuals are identifiable as part of a specific social movement largely through the use of symbols. Goodnow suggests that this is because symbols can summarize and "act as a synecdoche for movements" (Goodnow, 2006:177). However, there is currently limited research on the roles of symbols within visual media in social movements. Therefore, this will be focused on in this research.

Recently, the use of social media as a space for activism is studied in regard to generating networks and connection (Jackson et al., 2020; McGarry et al., 2020). For example, with #MeToo and the 2020 Black Lives Matter movements, networks were formed, and connections were built between participants. Much of the contemporary research on networks and connection in online activism has focused on discourse and hashtag analysis (Clark, 2016; Jackson et al., 2020; Mendes et al., 2018). In terms of visuals, research has commonly included analyzing visual texts like photographs, posters, and the physical performance of protest which all work to build networks and connection (Butler, 2015; McGarry et al., 2020). This research therefore aims to examine how online activism can build networks and connect individuals with shared values but with focus on how symbols in visual media are specifically used in social movements to do so.

Qualitative research aims to explore how humans understand and relate to events taking place in the world or directly in the societies they live in or are a part of (Bengtsson, 2016). As Flyvbjerg (2001) suggests, the purpose of case studies is to understand a phenomenon and get a deeper insight on it. This research will thus use the case study of the Women's Strike in Poland to explore the role of symbols and visual media in online activism in relation to networks and connection. Coming from a visual culture and graphic design background compelled my personal motivation to explore this area from a media and communication studies perspective. Another personal motivation for approaching this thesis topic ties into Dahlgren's exploration of civic identity and engagement (Dahlgren, 2009, 2013). This thesis was an opportunity to become familiarized with the current political and cultural atmosphere of Poland. As a Polish citizen, this kind of participation was meaningful and generated a sense of belonging for me in contributing research on an ongoing movement in Poland (Dahlgren, 2013:27).

Women's Strike in Poland

Currently, the largest party in the Polish parliament is Law and Justice, or 'Prawo i Sprawiedliwość' (PiS) in Polish. PiS is a national conservative and right-wing populist political party and some its core values include Polish and Catholic nationalism. In the 2015 Polish parliamentary election, PiS formed a majority government, and were re-elected in the 2019 parliamentary election. When the right-wing coalition took over, they immediately started to change factors overseeing Polish civil society headed by President Andrzej Duda. Duda was re-elected in 2020 by winning 51.03% of the vote over Liberal candidate Rafał Trzaskowski, according to the National Electoral Commission (Wanat, 2020). Some of these factors included abortion rights in Poland.

Since the 1989 political transformation in Poland, where the country moved out of a communist regime and returned to democracy, reproductive rights in Poland have been a subject of "heated political debates […] [that] remain unresolved and are contested by both sides of the confrontation" (Nowicka & Regulska, 2020:230). In 2016, a ruling overseen by PiS was proposed that severely restricted access to abortion in Poland. Prior to the proposal, abortions were legal in the case of (1) saving a woman's life and health, (2) when pregnancy was a result of the crime of rape or incest, and (3) serious fetal malformation (Nowicka et al., 2020:237).

The new law[1] proposal does not allow legal abortion in cases of fetal defects which account for roughly 96% of terminations carried out in Poland in recent years (Nacher, 2020). Thus, it would ban abortion in almost all cases and introduce the threat of criminal prosecution for both doctors who take part in carrying out the unconstitutional termination and women undergoing the procedure (Korolczuk, 2017:2). Ultimately, the law raises concern on reproductive rights and gender equality, leading to the formation of the social movement Women's Strike in Poland, or 'Strajk Kobiet' in Polish.

On 22 October 2020, the announcement of the Constitutional Tribunal issuing a ruling[2] that set the abortion law proposal in motion to be passed marked the first day that protesting opposing this ruling began. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and public gathering restrictions, "the 2020 protests occurred both on- and offline" (Nacher, 2020:3). Online activism played a key role in mobilizing groups. On 30 October 2020, police estimated that 480,000 people mobilized in protest in major Polish cities as well as small towns and villages outside of urban centres (Nacher, 2020:10). This marked the Women's Strike as the largest protest in Poland since the collapse of communism in 1989, with the Polish capital Warsaw seeing over 100,000 protesters gathered on that day alone (Nacher, 2020:10). The All-Poland Women's Strike or 'Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet' in Polish is one of the organizing groups of the movement and its mobilization events, and it was founded in 2016 by women's rights activist Marta Lempart (Nacher, 2020:3). Since 2016, Lempart and the All-Poland Women's Strike have aided in the organization of mobilization for the Women's Strike movement. The movement has carried on from 2016 into 2021. Although the abortion law was formally passed on 27 January 2021, the work of the movement and its in-person demonstrations continue.

As a country, Poland has one of the most restrictive laws in the world when it comes to legal access to abortion (Żuk & Żuk, 2017). As an example of a contemporary reproductive rights and women's rights movement against such restrictions, the Women's Strike in Poland stands out as making history with its shows of support and large demonstrations which were facilitated through online activism. A unique facet of this case is the use of specific symbols within the visual media to build networks and connections between participants of the movement. This establishes the movement as a case study with rich potential to contribute to the analysis of the

[1] Republic of Poland. Journal of Laws of 2021, Item 175. Judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal dated 22 October 2020. Date of announcement: 27 January 2021. Available at: <https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/DU/2021/175/>.
[2] Ruling was issued at the Polish Constitutional Tribunal hearing on 22 October 2020: Family planning, protection of the human fetus and conditions for the admissibility of termination of pregnancy.

role of symbols in social movements and justifies researching the movement during its historical articulation in 2020.

Research Approach

The qualitative methods of visual analysis and semi-structured interviews selected for the research will be discussed and reflected on within the methodology. The visual analysis aims to semiotically analyze the recurring symbols found in the visual media of the Women's Strike in Poland and examine how these symbols become the core identifiers of the movement. Social constructionism proposes that culture determines the way people understand their world and the concepts that have shaped it is, whereas knowledge is gathered from everyday interactions between people and the language they use (Burr, 2015:4). Therefore, along with the method of visual analysis, the interview method will also be conducted for the research. The interview method aims to explore how participants of the Women's Strike understand and use the recurring symbols of the movement. Alongside this, the research will analyze how these participants connect with other participants in the social movement by using visual media. The interviews will investigate the role of symbols and visual media in online activism to support networks and connection in this social movement. The methodology will be followed by an analysis section where the findings of the research will be illuminated in connection to the four areas discussed in the literature review. Finally, the conclusion will reflect on the study and serve to answer the research questions of the thesis with the findings. The following research questions have been designed to guide the thesis:

- *How do specific symbols represent the Women's Strike in Poland in visual media?*
- *How are these specific symbols in the visual media used by participants of the movement?*
- *How are symbols and visual media for online activism used to support networks and connection in the Women's Strike in Poland?*

II. THE ROLE OF SYMBOLS AND VISUAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The purpose of this section is to synthesize existing literature surrounding the thesis topic to provide a critical stance for the work (Hart, 1998). In order to situate my case study on the Women's Strike in Poland, the areas of visual media, online activism, networks and connection are at the core of the research. Ultimately, this exploration will examine the role of symbols and visual media in social movements as being for communication and identification, awareness, networks, and connection.

COMMUNICATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Communication

"The presence, and relevance, of images in […] social movements is no novelty" and visual media have been observed as an intrinsic part of this phenomenon (Doerr et al., 2013:xi). A reason for this is because images or visuals can be analyzed using semiotics and the myth, where meanings can be attached to certain symbols. "Semiotic materials never simply denote something. They are always loaded with ideas and values" (Ledin & Machin, 2018:68). In this sense, visual media and symbols are powerful forms of media that can carry and communicate a message. For this research, the term 'symbol' will be used for an individual image or visual, which is drawn from Goodnow's 2006 work on symbols as visuals within the rhetoric of campaigns for social movements. 'Visual media' will be used to refer to the media texts that the symbol appears in, such as posters, illustrations, photographs, or social media posts. The term 'visuals' will thus be used to refer to both image-based symbols and visual media. In analyzing the role of symbols and visual media in social movements, we can start by addressing a foundational element in the study of visuals: semiotics. Semiotics "is a system that gets to the heart of how the communication of meaning is made possible between two or more people" (Howells & Negreiros, 2019:16-17).

Roland Barthes extends Ferdinand de Saussure's originally established semiotics to the analysis of visual and popular culture (Howells et al., 2019:3). In constructing a system that aims to investigate how meaning is created, and specifically, how visuals make meaning (Rose,

2016:106), Barthes gives us a tool to understand society through visual analysis. What separates Barthes' method from previous semiotic analysis systems is the graduated step of the myth. For Barthes, myth encapsulates meanings through denotation and connotation. He recognizes that the possibility for different meanings to arise is a consequence of the semiotic system itself. The essence of the myth is that "other possible meanings are floating: the meaning can almost always be *interpreted"* (Barthes, 1972 in 1993:132). According to Barthes, a visual's meaning "depends on the users of the myth" (Ibid:58). In this sense, visuals can mean what their interpreters want them to mean. In applying semiotics and Barthes' concept of myth to the visual analysis of symbols in social movements, symbols can communicate specific meanings and be identified in specific ways.

For a symbol to be established and used within a social movement, Goodnow (2006) ascertains that they must have a characteristic of being replicated easily and have a degree of ambiguity (Goodnow, 2006:170). Popularity and the use of a symbol within a social movement can be dictated by being something anyone can reproduce. The replication of a symbol is possible when it is simple enough to adapt. This allows participants of the movement to produce a common likeness of the symbol when replicating it "while maintaining the association with the original symbol" (Goodnow, 2006:170). When a symbol is ambiguous or arbitrary, users of the symbol can apply any meaning to it. This includes meanings tied to a specific social movement or meanings that fit into the individual's own value system. This ambiguity allows many and any interpretations of the symbol to be made, which reflects Barthes' idea that unlimited meanings can be interpreted from a visual. Howells and Negreiros (2019) extend this notion in suggesting that "because the sign is arbitrary […] the relationship between a signifier and a signified can change over time. […] In itself, therefore, the signifier is an empty vessel into which cultural meaning is poured to imbue it with meaning." (Howells et al., 2019:5-8). Their argument suggests that symbols can be interpreted as having any meanings that the creator and users of the symbol impose on it, and therefore communicate meanings tied to a specific social movement.

Identification

Scholars argue that interpretation of a visual depends on the context (Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2000:3; Howells et al., 2019). When symbols are used within the context of social movements,

they can be interpreted as being associated with a specific social movement and can furthermore act to explain it (Goodnow, 2006:172). “Symbols may be used because of their power to condense, to act as representations for their causes” (Goodnow, 2006:172). A reason for the use of visuals as symbols is their exclusion of text, which increases their ability for being universally understandable without potential barriers that can come from language. The replicability and ambiguity of visual symbols also adds to their simplicity and allows the symbol to become effectively remembered and recalled. The symbol therefore becomes identifiable and associated with a specific social movement (Skaggs, 1994).

Symbols do not have to be situated in or used in one specific social movement to indicate a specific message. An example of a symbol that is both simple to replicate and ambiguous that has gathered a specific meaning for a social movement is the rainbow flag. The symbol is mainly used for movements supporting rights of members in the LGBTQ+ community (Garrett-Walker & Montagno, 2021; Wolowic et al., 2017). The symbol of the rainbow flag was designed with the idea that the colours in the flag each represent a concept relating to LGBTQ+ pride and the community and that the colours together create a rainbow (Rapp, 2015). The rainbow flag is a simple symbol to replicate by individuals who want to create visual media in relation to LGBTQ+ rights and movements in support of that. Designed in 1978 by Gilbert Baker, the symbol transcends situated places by being used in both pride parades and protests for rights, for example (Rapp, 2015). The symbol further transcends situated time and place by reappearing to promote LGBTQ+ rights within different arenas of social movements. This includes movements predominantly in the USA in the 1980s to recent LGBTQ+ rights protests in Poland which occurred after ‘LGBT-free zones’ were declared at the level of municipalities, cities, and regions in Poland in 2019 and 2020 (Żuk et al., 2021:4). The meaning of the rainbow symbol is connected to supporting the LGBTQ+ community’s rights and values. When it appeared in these social movements it was identifiable by its users and the audience as being associated with this meaning.

With this ease of replication and ambiguity, contextualization and recontextualization of a symbol becomes important as different social movements can end up using the same symbol. This can be seen in the cases of the 2014 democracy protests in Hong Kong or ‘Umbrella Revolution’ (Leung, 2014:132) and the 2016 Women’s Strike in Poland or ‘Black Protest’ (Korolczuk, 2017). Here, both use the symbol of an umbrella within their respective movements. An umbrella as an object does not necessarily mean something explicit to all users.

Yet, in the context of the social movement it appears in, the umbrella symbol transforms from signifying a tool for shielding oneself from rain to becoming a host for meanings about opposing a dominating power, like the government. Daphi, Lê and Ullrich (2013) propose that visuals "are not only a product of movements, but also part of the symbolic practices which constitute the movement and its identity, and are embedded in national and sectoral contexts" (Daphi et al., 2013:76). Thus, the context of where the symbol is situated is important to recognize in order to know what the symbol is referring to.

What is also interesting with the example of the umbrella as a symbol in social movements is that the umbrella symbol used in the 2016 Women's Strike in Poland reappears and is used again in the 2020 articulations of the social movement, which will be addressed in later analysis. This is important because the intention of repeating this symbol is to directly reference the 2016 Women's Strike which underlines that once a symbol is established it can be used to raise awareness for a specific social movement. "Social movements need and praise visibility. […] Symbols are particularly important for movements as they need to build identities as well as capture the attention of the media and the public" (della Porta, 2013:142). Building identities means creating the meaning that the symbol is associated with the social movement so that those who see the symbol understand this connection. Identification occurs through repetition and visibility of the symbol which allows the public to learn the symbol and its associations (Skaggs, 1994:81).

AWARENESS

Online activism

The role of media in shaping reality has grown and become complex in the 21st century. Understanding how emergent technologies like social networking sites and platforms are reconstructing the circulation of messages can impact how individuals can create social change in society. Platforms allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:60), which includes these symbols and visual media in connection to a social movement. "Web 2.0, with its opportunities and limits, […] facilitate[s] the spread of information transmitted via images even more than words" (della Porta, 2013:138-139). It is

through the development of Web 2.0 that society has moved into a more participatory culture where connectivity is possible through these platforms, and where new ways of communicating, building communities, and even advancing democracy emerge (van Dijck, 2013:4).

Papacharissi argues that the internet cannot create something out of nothing without the input of individuals, and thus cannot create or destroy democracy on its own (Papacharissi, 2020:2). So, while the internet allows a space to make societal issues more spreadable and visible by allowing more voices in, it does not equalize these voices or issues (Ibid:3). "To paraphrase George Orwell, all voices are equal online but some voices are more equal than others" (Papacharissi, 2021). While social media such as Instagram and Facebook create spaces for communication and public discussion, they are only accessible to those with internet access, a device, the social media application, and an account. This reflects the affordances of different social media and the limitations they have as platforms in terms of which voices are able to be present in these discussions and community formations. In this sense, platforms are not "inherently democratic" (McGarry et al., 2020:22) and restrictions are still present.

Another critical point around access is that users are dependent on the infrastructure of these platforms. Van Dijck comments that "social media services can be both intensely empowering and disturbingly exploitative" in her exploration of platforms and connectivity (van Dijck, 2013:18). Websites and applications are typically privately owned, and the online social activities of users generate data which become sources of economic capital for the owners. With this also comes the concern of online state surveillance. Here, governments can repress certain content often in the form of censorship and limiting users' abilities to access to platforms or the internet (Earl, 2019:298). Police can also access and use content related to radical politics circulated online against participating individuals. In this sense digital technologies can also restrict the opportunities for participation and engagement within them because of how they are structured. "Although it is clear that ICTs can be used to surveil and repress protest, repression does not always deter future protest participation and sometimes even increases subsequent engagement" (Earl, 2019:290).

McGarry et al. underscore that "the possibilities for participation and communication have far reaching potential" (McGarry et al., 2020:22). In connection to social movements, the spreading of awareness of information online ultimately acts to "create visibility for the

perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups in the mainstream arenas of political deliberation" (Polletta, 2006 in Doerr et al., 2013:9). These mainstream arenas imply social media platforms where public discussions occur and shape political opinions and discourse. An alternative and digital space for people to engage with politics has been created "that is, in theory, more inclusive and participatory than traditional electoral politics" (McGarry et al., 2020:19). Another reason for increased inclusivity is that geographical borders are effectively non-existent online, and messages can be spread globally. As discussed earlier, a characteristic of symbols being used within social movements is that they are easily replicable. McGarry et al. (2020) propose that visual symbols contain "a high capacity to be replicated digitally and shared across social media networks, ideological terrain, state borders, and linguistic frontiers" (McGarry et al., 2020:18). In this sense, symbols for social movements are not limited to being circulated within a certain country and can be spread by participants virtually. MacDowall (2017) specifically points to Instagram as an image-sharing platform which can act "as a set or backdrop for the production of digital content and a site of globally connected political action" (MacDowall, 2017:232)".

Another aspect of the limitlessness of participating in a social movement online is that "new technologies […] blur the borders between producers and consumers of information" (della Porta, 2013:138). This means that individuals can easily participate in both the creation of content and the spreading of the message to raise awareness of a social movement. Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune argue that "commercial and public mass media no longer have a monopoly over the visual representation of protest" because of this immediate access to technology and content sharing platforms that individuals have (Doerr et al., 2013:6). Individuals can make and circulate their own digital art with a specific symbol to be associated with a social movement online, or they can attend in-person mobilizations and use their smart phones to take photos and videos of the scene. As these can be "uploaded in real time by those who participate in protests" a "rich visual narrative of protests" is created and "spread virally to audiences far beyond the social movement scene" (Doerr et al., 2013:6). "Activists, but also their sympathetic audiences, easily become visual producers through practices of the remediation and remixing of visual materials about protests" (Doerr et al., 2013:6). The production of visual media for a social movement becomes a form of participation and thus activism because it encourages "a process of empowerment and movement building" (Lewin, 2020:44 in McGarry et al., 2020). An extension of online activism practices which will not be focused on in this research include techniques of culture-jamming "which disrupt or subvert [society] through satire, graffiti,

hacking of […] sites, and parodies" (McLaren, 2013:83). These can be powerful in establishing visibility and creating awareness for social movements by disrupting the daily routines of individuals.

Goodnow recognizes awareness as a function of symbols within social campaigns (Goodnow, 2006:172). This implies that another role of symbols in social movements is in working to build awareness about the social movement with people who view the circulated symbol. The visual media for the Women's Strike movement in Poland was created with the intention to raise awareness about the social movement or to be used during demonstrations, for example. Symbols can be used both in two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations to be associated with a social movement (Doerr et al., 2013:7; Goodnow, 2006:170). They can be articulated in visual media such as in illustrations, posters, stickers, pins, or drawn on handmade signs for example.

Another important way to increase visibility and awareness is to circulate the visual media and symbols online. When communication, identification and visibility are ensured, the power of symbols is that displaying them "allows group members to show their association without necessarily showing a name" (Goodnow, 2006:175). When individuals share the visual media and symbols associated with the social movement with their networks online, it means they are participating in spreading awareness about the movement (Goodnow, 2006:174). It can also mean that they are taking an individual stance and connecting to the social movement. Part of this is the notion that platforms give individuals a space to participate, including participating in a social movement. Participating online is easy because of the usability design of social media like Instagram and Facebook. Online activism accounts for these processes where individuals participate in the social movement by creating and sharing content on social media.

Critiquing online activism

New technological advances and the simplification of the ability to share content online are consequently a reason for why online activism has received criticism. A concern about the operation of social movements in a digital environment through spreading awareness and creating visibility is that there is little time and action required to participate (Dennis, 2019). Online activism has therefore been negatively typecast as 'slacktivism'. The essence of this

criticism for online activism is that the observable behaviour of participation, namely the sharing of visual media on social media platforms, and the "parameters of engagement" (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020) are critiqued. In *Parameters of Media Engagement*, Dahlgren and Hill consider a reconceptualization of the term engagement, where they argue that engagement is "a powerful subjective experience" and "an energizing internal force" that helps motivate participation (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020). In their analysis of media engagement under this definition, one critique on online activism is the parameter of motivation. Motivation refers to the "intentionality behind engagement" which can in some cases implicate a "sense of obligation or solidarity, some kind of social value that resides beyond the self" (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020). Here, feeling good takes priority over political commitment (Morozov, 2011). A problem arises when individuals participate in social movements online for the sake of getting involved in something that is trending. This potentially includes sharing content online without an attempted understanding of the values or goals represented by the social movement, or without having a real personal commitment or interest in helping to create social change.

For example, the recent 2020 resurfacing of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement against racism, anti-blackness, and police brutality (Attiah, 2020) came with global force. Alongside this there was a social media trend to post a black square on your Instagram feed to show awareness and support with the BLM movement. First it is important to address the controversy that ensued from an unclear understanding of what posting the black tile meant, highlighting the sheer speed of online communication whereby a trend can quickly spiral out of control. Essentially, the black tile trend in part emerged as a concept where industries and brands would pause their output for a day, and to make businesses consider how "their industries profit immensely from black creativity" thus showing support for the protesters (Attiah, 2020). The result was that of over 16 million Instagram users (Sebenius, 2020) jumped on the bandwagon to post a black square and consequently flooded important hashtags with useless information. The hashtags #blacklivesmatter and #blm, which were being used to circulate information for communicating with protesters, were suddenly being drowned out by this trend (Sebenius, 2020) on Instagram and other platforms, achieving the opposite effect of intended support. Posting a black square with this lack of awareness for its initial purpose was therefore criticized and the action dubbed as performative solidarity (Attiah, 2020) or performative allyship (Jackson et al., 2020:153) where public displays of a mainstream opinion were shared so that individuals could be perceived as showing support.

True allyship works when "allies leverage their privilege to bring attention and resources to issues that do not directly affect them, with the understanding that this practice is useful not only in uplifting more vulnerable groups but also to creating a more just society on the whole" (Jackson et al., 2020:153). In this performative aspect of online activism in this case, anyone with access to a social media platform could easily post a black square to their account's feed, but nothing prevented them from stopping their support and activism after that act of participation. Almost as immediately as the trend began, this critique erupted and participants were called to go beyond this action and continue doing the work of educating themselves on systemic racism, donating to organizations that tackle racial discrimination, amplifying Black innovation, as well as mobilizing in person for protests and rallies.

The criticism of online activism also prioritizes in-person mobilizations that support social movements. It argues that online activism favours less commitment than the commitment it takes to participate in person which is a "physical investment in time and risk" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011; McGarry et al., 2020). Unfortunately, this critique "ignores important mobilization and communication interactions that happen in digital spaces" (Bennett et al., 2012; Earl et al., 2011; McGarry et al., 2020). What is important to online activism is the argument that "aesthetics can act as a resource for further mobilization" (Doerr et al., 2013 in McGarry et al., 2020:17). The step that circulating visual media and symbols plays in social movements is that awareness is being built about the movement. From this stem the connections between other individuals in the social movement and networks are created. Simply put, "social media is the digital media that enable people to communicate and interact via virtual communities and networks" (Poulsen & Kvåle, 2018:700). It is in these networks that individuals exist, communicate, and can create change.

NETWORKS

Power, counter-power, and mass self-communication

Castells' theoretical concept of the network society can be used to understand group formation as part of social movements. Groups are a collective of individuals with shared beliefs and values. It is individuals who have the capacity to challenge institutions that hold dominant

power in society like governments. This is known as counter-power which Castells believes is a force that can "eventually change the power relations institutionalized in society" (Castells, 2007:248). The most significant expressions of counter-power are social movements. Social movements are expressions of counter-power and they are formed by groups confronting societal injustices (Castells, 2015:12). The counter-power group is furthermore a network, and these networks are organized online and then protest against the dominant power. In the case study of this research, the Polish government is the dominant power. "Wherever is domination, there is resistance to domination" (Castells, 2015:12). The term domination is used to express the feeling of overbearing power that can come from the removal of rights for example. Therefore, the individuals that are part of the Women's Strike movement and protest in opposition to the dominant power make up the counter-power. The quote from Castells' can further imply that individuals will always feel the need to respond to forms of injustice by making their voices heard and communicating their opinion.

Thanks to the global accessibility of the internet, individuals have the opportunity for mass self-communication which is "self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception" (Castells, 2007:248). In connection to the previous section about online activism, it is through social media platforms that mass self-communication is employed. Mass self-communication is part of what gives individuals the capability to create and share their own content with specific messages (Castells, 2007), as in through symbols and visual media associated with a social movement. Through this online space emerge expressions of counter-power, the creation of networks, and the possibility for connectivity (van Dijck, 2013). The work and research of Jackson et al. (2020) in *Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice*, suggests that online communication can become an organizing thread that stitches together regular people into vast networks. In these networks, views against a dominant power can be expressed and the networks are capable of influencing mainstream media and by proxy influencing public opinion. By extension of online communication in sharing visual media and symbols for a specific movement for example, people are able to create a broadcast mechanism because of the amount of people participating (Jackson et al., 2020). By working together to communicate a message, build identification and spread awareness, these networks are able to harness the kind of power that is typically restricted to people in mainstream elite positions that hold power. Therefore, in these organically created online networks, individuals work together to create an alternative or counter-power narrative that then get pushed into the mainstream conversation (Jackson et al., 2020).

Mobilization

Hine's (2015) discussion referring to digital ethnography can also be applied to networks. Her suggestion that "tracing networks of connection through online and offline space" (Hine, 2015:25) can relate to the expressions of the movement within these two spaces. "As Renato Rosaldo argues, cultural citizenship is concerned with 'who needs to be visible, to be heard, and to belong'" (Rosaldo, 1999:260 in Stevenson, 2003:23). It is because of restrictions by a dominant power that voices are not heard, which puts democracy into question and produces counter-power narratives. Relating to online activism and how counter-power forces find the ability to communicate online, Castells (2015) also talks about social media and networks as offering "the possibility for largely unfettered deliberation and coordination of action" (Castells, 2015:9-10). These networks can ultimately be taken offline in the form of mobilization to protest in and occupy a physical space. "Protests emerge when people come together to react against exclusion, inequality and injustice, usually propagated by the state or government" (McGarry et al., 2020:16).

Protests can occur as strikes, situated demonstrations or marches, but the idea of a group of people occupying or moving through a physical space together clearly shows the amount of people standing behind a movement and embodying this counter-power. This visibility also represents the "expression of dissenting voices which challenge the political legitimacy of the state or an authority" and "creates and amplifies a political voice" (McGarry et al., 2020:17). In another respect, protesting not only seeks visibility but also "to disrupt the existing political order […] and create new possibilities" (McGarry et al., 2020:16). This is exactly what the work of the 2016 protests and mobilizations in Poland aimed to do.

In connection to this case study on the 2020 Women's Strikes in Poland, the movement can be seen as kicking off in 2016 when the announcement by the government of proposing a total abortion ban came into discussion (Korolczuk, 2017). "Mass demonstrations on October 3, 2016, dubbed by the media as Black Monday, were just the high point of a wave of protests that began already in early spring" of that year (Korolczuk, 2017:4). Black Monday was part of the movement of 'Black Protests' translated from the Polish 'Czarny Protest', where the name came from protesters wearing all black and carrying black umbrellas at the mobilization. Korolczuk (2017) argues that a key factor of the successful mobilization seen in this social movement was that it "followed the logic of connective action based on personalized

engagement, in which communication became an important element of organizational structure" (Korolczuk, 2017:3).

The logic of 'connective action' is a term coined by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) where "the formative element of 'sharing' […] leads actions and content to be distributed widely across social networks" where networks are enabled growth and stability by communication technologies like the internet and platform hosting devices (Bennett et al., 2012:24). Connective action encompasses the processes of online activism that were earlier discussed which ultimately connects to the role of symbols and visual media in social movements. Nacher (2020) synthesizes Korolczuk's (2016) discussions of Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) connective action in examining the Black Protests, highlighting that the Black Protests exemplified connective action through the "formation of 'loose public networks' […] making social activity 'more flexible and personalized' (p.7) – as juxtaposed to collective action requiring significant organizational resources" (Nacher, 2020:8). As discussed earlier, this gives participating in the social movement an easier access point for individuals to spread awareness, create networks, and mobilize. In some cases, protests "have resulted in significant changes to policies and legislation as well as to attitudinal transformations in local, national and international contexts" (McGarry et al., 2020:15). For example, legalizing same-sex marriage in the USA in all 50 states in 2015 after a history of LGBTQ+ activism and civil rights protests and demonstrations.

The 2016 Black Protests were driven by the hope that their action would result in changes to policies and legislation in Poland as well as opinions about reproductive rights in Polish society. As the 2020 Constitutional Tribunal issued a ruling about the law and passed it in 2021, the Women's Strike in Poland presently continues as does the connective action of those involved in the movement. After a protest, individuals physically disconnect from the group, but it is important to stay connected virtually and know what to do next to support the movement. The importance of online activism and networks is that they facilitate the connection among individuals which leads to action.

CONNECTION

Building connection

The visual quality of symbols makes them "easier to agree upon than discourses, and are easier to synthesize diversity in a common vision" (della Porta, 2013:143). Establishing a meaning for a symbol in a social movement works to unify the networked individuals. As discussed in the first section, identifying the movement through specific symbols becomes an entry point into how individuals become aware of and connect with a specific movement (Goodnow, 2006:172). Another aspect is that a symbol's "function of identification allows those within the movement to forge bonds among movement participants" (Goodnow, 2006:174). For example, when a specific symbol is seen and recognized for its association with a specific movement, a connection can be established between the viewer and the individual who shared the symbol. This is because both individuals share this identification of the symbol, which can further build relationships between individuals that are part of a specific movement. "The display of common symbols allows movement members to feel part of a group and serves to add to group cohesion" (Goodnow, 2006:174). In this sense, the role of symbols and visual media in social movements can be to act as a unifying force for the network of individuals in the movement to build connection. For those that can identify the association of the shared symbols, a sense of inclusion in the group through understanding occurs. Whereas if an individual does not have the shared understanding of the symbol when they see it circulated, a sense of exclusion may occur. Despite this, repetition of the symbol in public media reflects that the associated movement's "group has internal cohesion through shared symbolic means" (Goodnow, 2006:174). The repetition and circulation of these symbols ultimately offers a chance for individuals within the movement to "communicate their ideals and goals to those people within and those people outside of the movement" (Goodnow, 2006:166).

Online activism or participation in a social movement through sharing visual media and symbols is this step that allows for connections to be built. Nichols claims that "by means of symbols we can enter into processes of communication and exchange with one another" (Nichols, 1981:1-3). What these processes of communication can illuminate is a shared sense of purpose among participants. In the case of the 2020 Women's Strikes in Poland, the shared values of protesting governmental rulings and supporting gender equality and reproductive

rights are common aspects of what brings individuals in this social movement together. 'Connectivity' from van Dijck's concept of 'cultures of connectivity' can also therefore be highlighted within networks where she claims that common desires play an important role in harnessing bonds and discovering group affiliations (van Dijck, 2013:35). Van Dijck discusses the shift that online technologies and cultures are experiencing in contemporary society as they move from practices of connectedness to practices of connectivity (van Dijck, 2013). Individuals too are moving beyond only wanting to be connected online at a surface level. There is a desire to experience deeper bonds and attachments with others in the form of connectivity, which can also be a motivating factor in their participation in online activism. Van Dijck (2013) argues that connectivity and online activism should be considered as working in parallel to and in dialogue with offline mobilization.

Solidarity, allyship, and networked feminism

One expression of this connectivity is solidarity. During offline mobilization of a social movement, "the solidarity expressed […] during protests draws attention to those silenced voices laying claim to the democratic sphere, drawing attention to their collective existence" (Butler, 2015 in McGarry et al., 2020:19). This in turn gives visibility and presence to the counter-power. As discussed, "through the use of digital technologies and social media, protestors have been able to create an alternative space for people to engage with politics that is, in theory, more inclusive and participatory than traditional electoral politics" (McGarry et al., 2020:19). Social movement participants create or find channels to openly communicate their opinions which create online spaces where they can receive and give support. It is also through this communication that broader structural social problems are discussed (Mendes et al., 2018:238) and where connection is built through solidarity. Solidarity comes from individuals in a group and network feeling unified because of a shared value or common goal and thus garner a sense of mutual support from each other.

Another expression of connectivity within social movements is allyship which is similar to solidarity but more so highlights aspects of diversity. "Allies play integral roles in broadcasting […] networks created by marginalized groups" (Jackson et al., 2020:152). A group that is not directly negatively targeted and is instead in a position of privilege can be in support of a social movement by amplifying the voices of the targeted group. Allyship can be seen in the Women's

Strikes through individuals without female reproductive organs participating in the movement showing their support for the targeted group. In this case they show solidarity and become allies of women who are targeted by the law which restricts access to legal abortion. Another example of allyship can be seen in LGBTQ+ movements where individuals who identify as heterosexual and are not on the spectrum of LGBTQ+ show their support for LGBTQ+ individuals and their rights. Likewise, when a person who identifies on the spectrum of LGBTQ+ supports the rights of another member, for example someone who identifies as a lesbian can be allies of those who identify as transgender. "In its most useful and radical form, allyship then draws from the idea that no one can be truly free unless everyone is free" (Jackson et al., 2020:153). Alongside this and her own academic work in solidarity, Butler recently asks us to rethink vulnerability and how we constitute vulnerable groups (Butler, 2020). Butler calls us to reflect on how we negotiate equality in terms of ethicality when determining which groups are vulnerable and in need of our support. She argues that vulnerable groups should not only be identified as passive (Butler, 2020:131) and that "sites of resistance […] are opened up by vulnerability" (Ibid:132).

Solidarity within the case study of the Women's Strike in Poland can also connect to the concept of networked feminism. Networked feminism is a term used regarding group formation based on shared goals and values around gender equality and reproductive rights. In their article about feminist online activism**,** Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2018) discuss how communication and engagement through social media can work to build networks of solidarity. Participants are given an opportunity to voice their feelings and opinions about an issue by sharing them online. Specifically, when sharing visual media, "images propagate perceptions, provide information, and elicit feelings" (Corner, 2011:14). Therefore, the use of visual media and symbols in social movements plays a role to not only spread awareness but to build connections. These feelings are shared and supported by others, thereby creating a space for solidarity and understanding through an online network. Communicating and sharing with others builds bonds between these individuals, especially in cases of participation in a social movement.

Solidarity is also created when differences are acknowledged and respected. Individuals do not have to agree on everything or even share all the same values in order to be part of the same network or movement. Within networked feminism, recognizing difference "strengthens the collective mission of feminist work: working toward understanding and bettering the lived

conditions of women everywhere" (Pruchniewska, 2016:739). Mendes et al. (2018) propose that the formation of feminist networks "provide important opportunities for the development of feminist solidarity and consciousness, and even, social change" and that creating social movements like the Women's Strike in Poland and popularizing forms of online activism "is laying the foundation for a collective shift towards a more just society" (Mendes et al., 2018:239).

The underlying thread for individuals supporting each other in social movements is the sense of hope. Clark-Parsons, a scholar and activist working in gender justice and technology studies, argues that all movements and the individuals participating in them require hope and ways of reimaging hope in order to endure whatever reality they are facing (Clark, 2016). Individuals can oppose and contest societal structures or forces that impede their rights and come together to rise up against the dominant power. They have hope that together and through action, things will change. Clark-Parsons attests that hope is created for individuals within these created networks and connections which enables participants to feel part of a community and a larger cause, like creating a more just society (Clark, 2016).

III. METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Qualitative research aims to study humans and analyze their understanding or connection to the world and certain phenomena (Bengtsson, 2016). The purpose of this research is to explore how individuals close to the phenomenon of the Women's Strike in Poland relate to certain aspects of the movement. This includes their involvement, their connection to others within the movement, as well as their understanding of symbols and visual media in the movement. In line with the mantra of "assume less and investigate more" (Corner, 2011:87), qualitative research methods will be used to gather empirical data that will be analyzed and connected back to the research questions of this thesis.

One-to-one, semi-structured interviews as a method is an appropriate method to further approach the theoretical concepts of the study by gaining an understanding of perspectives individuals have regarding the research topic. It prioritizes the subject's voice, where the researcher attentively listens to the experiences and opinions shared by the study participant. Here, personal stories and reflections from individuals are analyzed and are ultimately used as sources of data. Additionally, the research aims to investigate the symbols in the Women's Strike in Poland movement. Therefore, visual analysis as a method will also be used. Combining the methods of visual analysis and interviews together in this multi-method qualitative research will provide a deeper exploration of the case study.

This thesis was pursued during the COVID-19 pandemic and due to in-person gathering restrictions it was important and practical for the methods in this study to have the ability to be conducted online and remotely. Lastly, as this is a contemporary case study and action is continuing within the movement, it is important to note that relevant information about the case will only be analyzed up to the date of the last interview on 16 March 2021.

VISUAL ANALYSIS METHOD

Data Collection

Empirical data collection for the visual analysis method took place from December 2020 to January 2021. This data included visual media that was related to the Women's Strike in Poland in the form of graphic design, illustration, multi-media art, and photographs of in-person mobilizations. The visual media was observed on websites, articles, and social media accounts from the platforms Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. The scope of data collection was narrowed down to visual media posted online between 2020 to January 2021 and was therefore based in an online environment. Hansen and Machin (2013) suggest that "the internet has brought with it massively increased opportunities for observing, studying and analysing human behaviour and communication practices", but that new parameters for ethical conduct must be considered in the research (Hansen & Machin, 2013:25). For ethicality, the visual media data for the visual analysis method was sourced from public organizations, public websites, and publicly accessible social media accounts. Visual media sampled attempts to be the originally posted image, or the original source of the content that is created and circulated as part of the movement.

In initial observations of the visual media in the context of the Women's Strike movement, the presence of repeating symbols was notable. To narrow the scope of data collection and begin organizing the data, 2 broad categories of visual-based and text-based symbols were created in the early stages of the research. Within the visual category, 13 subcategories for recurring visual symbols were created. Within the text category, 6 subcategories for recurring text symbols were created. It is important to gather a large sample because having a sample of sufficient size enables the ability for comparison and a more thorough analysis of the data (Hansen & Machin, 2013). Thus, in total about 100 visual media texts for the empirical data were collected and organized (Appendix 1). This initial categorization helped establish a theoretical framework and design the research where the aim became to not analyze an individual visual media text as a whole, but to instead analyze the symbols that appeared within the visual media texts.

Sampling

From the initial observations, the subcategories reflected the kinds of symbols that were recurring in these visual media texts. Symbols from the visual media texts were isolated and analyzed. 19 subcategories and therefore 19 symbols were observed in the initial data collection, and to fit with the timeframe of the project, 5 subcategories that had the most visual media texts collected within them were chosen. This resulted in a visual analysis sample of 5 symbols which are the lightning bolt, profile of a woman's face, umbrella, hanger, and *The Handmaid's Tale* imagery (Figure 1; Appendix 2).

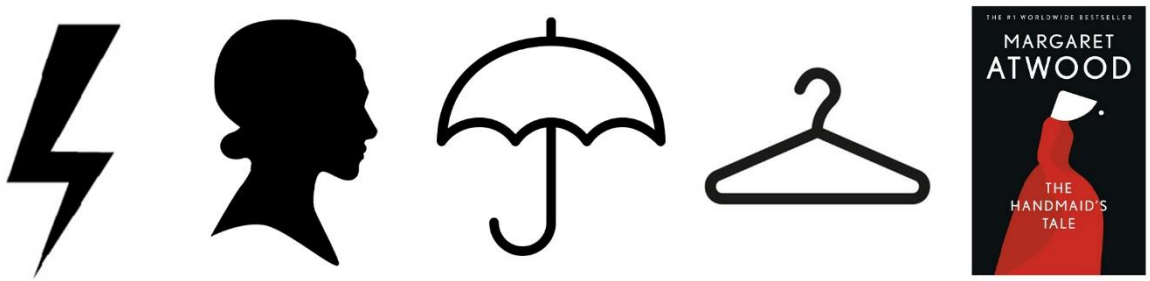

Figure 1. Visual Analysis Sample from Appendix 2

Semiotic Approach

The study of semiotics reveals that visual media can have meaning, and for this study the symbols themselves were analyzed using a semiotic approach. Leeuwen and Jewitt (2000) discuss the Barthesian method as an analysis that is layered, consisting of the denotative, connotative and myth levels of meaning and investigation (Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2000:3). Performing Barthesian denotation and connotation as referenced by Hansen and Machin (2013) provided a reliable system to interpret the symbols. Denotation looks at the visual at an immediate level where the method asks for a descriptive analysis of what we see (Ledin et al., 2018:67). Connotation asks us to then analyze the visual on top of this already established layer of recognition (Leeuwen et al., 2000:6), thereby asking what ideas and values are communicated through this representation (Machin & Mayr, 2012:50). Examining the myth associated with the symbol came from analyzing the denotation and connotation together (Appendix 3).

In his work, Barthes acknowledges "that we can only recognize what we already know" (Barthes, 1977 in Leeuwen et al., 2000:4). If we can only recognize what we know, then the interpretation is subjective based on the individual analyzing the visual. The ideological meanings that can arise are therefore reflective of the status quo and interests of the interpreter (Leeuwen et al., 2000:6) and so reflexivity becomes important to the analysis. Corner (2011) also addresses the aspect of subjectivity in media structure and process, where in contemporary society and research there is a need for greater reflexivity and criticality. Our experience of media and how it is organised directly involves the interconnected concerns of subjectivity, form, and power (Corner, 2011:2). Barthes' concept of myth suggests that when symbols are contextualized, the examined visuals possess deeper meaning which gives them power.

INTERVIEW METHOD

Within the semi-structured interview method, first an interview guide was developed to link back to the research questions and aims. Structuring the interview guide was key in mapping out the purpose of the interview method and the data it aimed to gather. The interview guide was first tested with a few peers and then with my supervisor to assess the questions for clarity and ease of understanding. After adjusting the interview guide with feedback, a pilot interview was conducted with a colleague who identified as Polish and had heard of the Women's Strike movement. This individual therefore had some knowledge on the topic and was selected in order to test what kinds of answers could be garnered from the set of questions during a non-pilot interview, as well as to get an estimate of the length of future interviews. The pilot interview helped to run through questions to see if their order was sensical and appropriate. Some questions were then rephrased, their order was changed, or they were removed. The final interview guide consisted of questions inquiring about the movement's symbols and visual media, addressed interviewee involvement within the movement in online and offline settings, and asked about interviewees' connections to others within the social movement (Appendix 7).

Sampling

As the thesis case study and visual analysis method focus on recent developments of the

movement, individuals who had been aware of the movement primarily between October 2020 to January 2021, and who had seen or had shared Women's Strike related visual media online between this time were recruited for the interview sample. Recruited individuals were also required to meet one of the following criteria of either currently residing in Poland, having family residing in Poland, or having Polish cultural background or citizenship. The rationale for this chosen criterion is that it ensures that the interviewee has a direct relation to the country, Polish language, and a political or historical understanding of the country where the movement is situated. Here, the connection to Polish civic identity is implied which is important for individuals "to see themselves as actors who can make meaningful interventions in relevant political issues" and for civic engagement (Dahlgren, 2013:24). It also acts as the uniting criteria for all the recruited individuals in the sample which can reveal specific experiences of the demographically or contextually defined group that are related to the phenomenon being studied (Bazeley, 2013:255). This however reveals a limitation of the study where individuals connecting with the movement in different ways or through global forms of solidarity were not included.

Initially, I was interested to recruit a sample that was diverse in how they identified in supporting the movement, which could include individuals who identified as being in opposition to the movement. This was considered to show a variety of perspectives in the empirical data. Recruiting these individuals would have been done by observing public Facebook groups where individuals who were in opposition the movement could exist, or by examining negative public comments by individuals within open Facebook groups that were supporting the movement. To avoid cherry picking individuals to reach out to that appeared to fit this identity, focus was instead placed on the snowball sampling technique. This is a participant recruiting technique that allows for the creation of a sample where individuals refer others from their network who would fit the required sampling criteria (Jensen, 2012:270). Individuals from my personal network were contacted and asked to recruit individuals from their own networks that fit the sampling criteria. The intent was that then those people could recruit more participants for the study. I contacted 25 people in my network through Facebook Messenger to help me recruit (Appendix 5). I reached out to all 10 individuals that were referred to me by my contacts over Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, or email, but only 9 individuals confirmed dates and times for an interview out of this group.

Simultaneously, I reached out to 11 contacts in my Instagram network to ensure enough

participants for the study in the case that snowball sampling could not progress. These were individuals I did not know in person but that I noticed had posted visual media on Instagram stories or posts in 2020 related to the Women's Strike movement. Only 3 individuals confirmed an interview out of this group. 12 participants in total consented to and were scheduled for an interview. In the end only 11 interviews took place as the final participant did not show up for their interview and did not respond to rescheduling requests via email. Conducting between 10-15 interviews was planned to fit within the project timeline and to gain enough data to analyze for the scope of the research. The final sample consisted of 8 female and 3 male participants ranging from 23 to 35 years of age. All participants are either Polish citizens or have relatives that live in Poland, and 5 participants currently live in Poland (Appendix 4).

Interviews

One-to-one, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were booked through email or social media correspondence and conducted digitally over the video call application Zoom. The choice to use Zoom was due to participants living in different cities from me, where I was based in Lund, Sweden at the time of the study. The choice to use Zoom was also due to increased familiarity and use of this platform during 2020 and 2021, mainly resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. Zoom was also used for its ability to record audio which could be saved and played back for transcription purposes.

When it comes to ethicality of the study, there was consent and a sense of control for both the participant and I. Individuals contacted me if they were willing to participate in the research and signed consent forms confirming this (Appendix 6). A consent form was designed so data could be collected about the interviewees including their gender, age, nationality, location of residence during the interview, length of the interview, and quotes from the interview. The research subjects therefore give informed consent and have the right to withdraw it at any time (Seale et al., 2007:219). Interviewees have been anonymized and no reference to their name is included in the thesis project. Files saved were titled according to the number that corresponded to the order the participants were interviewed in. All video and audio interview recordings will be deleted following the conclusion of the thesis course. The participant is therefore aware that they will be presented anonymously. This is important as this method seeks to find insightful information about the participants' reflections or judgements on certain topics in a non-

intrusive manner (Boyce & Neale, 2006). As personal safety in this sense is ensured, it enabled them to speak openly about their opinions including potentially sensitive or personal subjects like abortion, faith, or opposition to their government. At the same time, the participants also had the right to limit what they said or revealed in the interview.

Another ethical aspect to make participants feel comfortable during the interview was to build trust between myself and participant (Seale et al., 2007:222). Some time was therefore dedicated at the beginning of each interview to check in and chat before getting into the technical aspects of the interview. After this rapport building, the interview guide framework was touched on so they could feel comfortable with how much time they chose to dedicate to answering questions. This included telling the participant about how many questions they could expect during the interview and assuring them that it was fine if they found that they had a long answer for some questions and a shorter answer for other questions. In this way, I hoped to empower them to do their own time management during the interview while being assured that as the researcher, I had designed the questions to have room for them to speak extensively if they felt like doing so.

Semi-structured interviews offered the flexibility to slightly tailor interviews to each participant, for instance skipping questions that were irrelevant to the interviewee. For example, if a participant had not been to a protest in person, I would not ask them questions related to this as these answers would be hypothetical. In other instances, if I felt the interviewee was speaking heavily about a certain topic, I had the flexibility to pull questions from different sections to ask next while their mind was on this track. While this flexibility was drawn upon during the interviews, changing the order of the questions was done infrequently. All interviews were approached with the intention to ask as many questions from the interview guide in the same order as possible to control the method and keep the interview structure similar for each participant.

I refrained from speaking off the question script as much as possible while also trying to be natural within the dialogue of the interview. This was done to not lead the participant throughout the interview in any way, for example by not revealing my own perspective in nodding to confirm an opinion they had expressed. Limited speaking during the interview was also done to ensure neutrality, which is another important aspect of interviewing (Seale et al., 2007), and to control the number of personal expressions so that interview transcripts could

better showcase the voice of the interviewees. The intent of participant interviews is to focus on listening to what interviewees say and not interrupt them or sway them into shifting their course of dialogue to reflect any specific opinion. However, is it also important to recognize that statements from interviews "are not simply representations […] of what people think. All interview statements are actions in a context, arising from the interaction between interviewer and interviewee(s)" (Jensen, 2012:270). Being reflexive in the methodology means acknowledging that the interview data comes from a constructed environment. "Interview discourses are […] 'data.' They become sources of information through analysis, and of meaning through interpretation" (Jensen, 2012:270).

Interviews ranged between 21 to 68 minutes in length, excluding time spent talking before and after the interview. Interviews lasted around 40 minutes in length on average (Appendix 4). After each interview, reflexive notes including general interview observations and impressions were taken to aid the process of analysis and theorizing the data (Jensen, 2012:274). Interviews were scheduled within a 2-week window and in between new interviews previous interviews were transcribed. There was attention to transcribing one interview at a time in the order that they occurred in to better reflect on the memory of the interview and accurately understand what interviewees said (Appendix 8). Memos were noted to further describe interviewee statements or interpret them, and to translate Polish words to English. While all interviews were conducted in English to avoid misrepresentation or errors that could come about through translation, Polish was used at times when interviewees could not think of the English translation or phrasing during the interview.

ANALYZING THE DATA

Due to the structuring of this thesis, the literature review foundation and key concepts had already been decided and used to structure the interview guide. The coding process was thus also guided by this to a small extent. After the transcription process, I went through each of the transcripts again to perform open coding where singular ideas from the transcripts were written into a table. Kuckartz suggests that coding allows researchers to move through the data in a way that gives meaning (Kuckartz, 2014:23-25), and coding transcripts one by one allowed another chance to individually read the transcripts and connect to the voice of the interviewees.

The first interview transcript rendered 102 individual codes. Colour codes for initial categories were also established (Appendix 10). Open coding was utilized on the transcripts using the zigzag approach (Rivas, 2012) to analyze the data and connect it to key concepts, where one table was used for all the codes to track repeating codes and account for new codes. After the initial phase of coding all 11 transcripts, 311 codes occurred (Appendix 9). Descriptive and analytical codes were then further interpreted to create general categories which included subcategories and sub subcategories (Appendix 11). The overall analysis was based on inductive and deductive approaches (Rivas, 2012).

As Jensen proposes, "the use of multi-method research offers different types of data for you to compare and contrast as you construct a picture of a […] phenomenon" (Jensen, 2012:303). Therefore, the next phase of the method was to bring the interviews and visual analysis together to generate valuable data and address subjectivity. The interview guide included a section for interviewees to discuss the kinds of symbols and visual media they had seen within the movement or that was representative of the movement in their opinion. Each of the symbols or visual media they listed were approached individually with questions where interviewees could share their understanding of these symbols and their reflections on where else they had been used. After coding and categorizing the interview method findings, I moved from the interview method back to the visual analysis. It was beneficial to cross-reference my analysis of the symbols with interview findings to gain any new meanings or interpretations shared within the interviews. Having access to different perspectives for the semiotic approach was valuable in bringing in an aspect of validity to the visual analysis process (Appendix 3).

Qualitative research involves making several determining choices including selecting the case, theoretical framework, and suitable methods. Reflexivity about the consequences of these choices must be considered where the aim is to create transparency to ensure validity in the research (Seale et al., 2007:305). For transparency, an example of one of these decisions was to exclude analysis of text which included hashtags, mottos, phrases, slogans, chants, and songs that were together identified as visual media related to the movement and referred to by 8 interviewees. As this text-based data was mainly in the Polish language, time would have needed to be invested in accurate translations. The understanding of these expressions as carrying a specific meaning or quality of humour would ultimately risk being lost in translation. Textual analysis and discourse analysis are methods most suited to analyze this type of data, but which were not focused on in this research due to the scope and timeframe. Yet, this

decision does not negatively alter the value or validity of the research. As an "arbiter of validity is usefulness" (Seale et al., 2007:481), even with these elements removed, this research still manages to contribute data on the role of symbols and visual media and provides specific knowledge of their use in online activism and social movements.

As mentioned, in terms of personal motivations for approaching this thesis topic, I am a Polish citizen with a strong connection to Polish language and culture. My internal bias is also to view the Women's Strike as a positive and important movement that I am in support of. This reflexivity was important to keep at the forefront throughout the thesis process to ensure neutrality while working with the empirical data and analysis. Aside from this, it was also important to move through the methods and analysis flexibly, oscillating between being on the outside as an observer and being on the inside, interacting with the participants (Hine, 2015).

IV. WHEN SYMBOLS STRIKE

This analysis will examine the findings of the visual analysis and interview methods. First, how the symbols represent the Women's Strike in Poland and are understood by participants of the movement will be discussed. Next, the ways that participants of the movement use these symbols and visual media will be analyzed. Lastly, the sharing of symbols and visual media to build networks and connections between participants of the movement will be examined. The empirical data captures the voices of the research participants, and thus using direct quotes within the analysis will be used to reflect this and show transparency in the research.

SYMBOLS OF THE MOVEMENT

As discussed in the methodology section of the thesis, the data collection resulted in the observation of recurring symbols in visual media texts. 5 symbols with the most recurrence in the visual media sample were focused on for the visual analysis. In the interview method, participants likewise identified symbols in the visual media they observed within the movement and were asked to discuss their understanding of the symbols. The findings from the interviews were then related to the completed visual analysis of the symbols. In summary, the symbols that were the most repeated by interviewees included an umbrella, hanger, profile of a woman's face, and references to the novel or television series *The Handmaid's Tale*. The lightning bolt was observed to be the symbol that was most commonly found within visual media of the Women's Strike and was listed the most by interviewees. A reason for the recurrence of these symbols in visual media of the Women's Strike in Poland movement is due to the meaning decided on by the users of this symbol. Barthes discerns that a visual's meaning depends on the users of the visual and its myth (Barthes, 1972 in 1993:58). For example, the hanger symbol and *The Handmaid's Tale* references have also been used in other reproductive rights protests around the world. Due to the Women's Strike movement also being about reproductive rights, the symbols have similar meanings and appear here.

Hanger

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

A hanger is a common household object used to hang clothing. The reason this object becomes a symbol used within the Women's Strike movement is the meaning it holds in connection to abortion. Since hangers can be made of wire and are common in households, people had easy access to these objects in a private setting. Sometimes these wire hangers were deconstructed in order to perform an illegal abortion where the wire could be used to insert into the vagina to induce the termination of a pregnancy. While this is typically a free procedure, it could be performed by anyone and not necessarily a medical professional, is not guaranteed to terminate a pregnancy, and can result in blood loss, bodily harm, or infection. As this object can connote a connection to abortion, as a symbol it appears in movements about reproductive rights to underscore the lengths and risks people can go to when there is no legal access to safe abortion. Symbols like the hanger are tied to shocking or traumatic acts which we visualize and remember. Holding up the symbol of the hanger at a protest says, "if the government won't let me have a safe abortion, I have made my decision and I will do it myself, even if it means risking my life". It demonstrates that the law is not efficient in stopping abortions and instead just makes them unsafe.

> "In the past, women had to get the abortion by putting this, uh, to vagina. […] I think sometimes the symbols like this, they are important. And, unfortunately, we need symbols like this because it's very visual and we remember the dramatic, very tragic symbols like this." – *Interview 11*

Handmaid's Tale

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Imagery references to Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* which has recently been adapted into a television series in 2017, have also been seen within reproductive rights movements. Through the iconic red and white costume worn by female characters or depictions of this as a symbol within visual media, connections to the society that *The Handmaid's Tale* is based in are clear. *The Handmaid's Tale* constructs a dystopian society where faith and status are prioritized over women's rights. References to this world symbolize gender inequality, class inequality, and a removal of reproductive rights.

> "You have in this TV series a normal world that changed. […] people are very conservative, thinking that everything has to be like God said, but it has nothing to do with God. […] I see small similarities between this world and something that is going on right now. I'm like, wow, -laughs- what the fuck is going on?" – *Interview 8*

In terms of connection the Women's Strike in Poland, the colours of *The Handmaid's Tale* costumes are red and white which connect to Polish flag. The woman as a handmaid portrayed in this symbol can be a walking representation of the Polish flag, or furthermore, Poland.

From contemporary demonstrations on restrictive abortion laws in Poland, Ireland (2017) and Argentina (2018) where protesters donned red capes and white bonnets to make this pop culture

connection (Bell, 2018), to historical prochoice movements in the United States prior to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision to legalize abortion where protesters rallied with wire coat hangers (Joffe, 1991); ultimately, both the hanger and *Handmaid's Tale* symbols have been seen globally in other women's rights movements because of these connections. In this case study there were other symbols that became direct references to the Women's Strike in Poland movement, like the umbrella and profile of a woman's face. These symbols appeared in the Women's Strikes in Poland in 2016 and their usage in the 2020 continuation of the movement acts as a callback and reference to the work that was done in 2016 and are used now because of the meaning that had already been decided about the symbols.

Umbrella

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

One of the first organized strikes for this movement in 2016 occurred on a day where it was raining, and so hundreds of people filled the streets to strike with open umbrellas (Król & Pustułka, 2018:376). For those at the strikes, the presence of open umbrellas was prominent in the crowds and images taken of the event notably feature this sea of umbrellas, many of them black in colour. The umbrella was further adapted as a 2D symbol used in movement visual media to recall this specific strike. When participants of the movement see the black umbrella symbol now, they are reminded of the 2016 strikes, making the connection of this symbol to the movement.

> "When the first strike was organized, we didn't know that it will be raining during this day and that we will all have umbrellas. […] I still remember [it] and think that it will always be the historic symbol of this protest. It's a beautiful symbol of being there. […] It's easy to go to protests when it's sunny and you want to meet with your friends and, yeah, you are all happy, but it's much more difficult to go when it's raining or it's dark or it's frozen. It's about the presence."
>
> *– Interview 11*

An umbrella is a tool that people use to shield themselves from the rain. Within a gloomy, rainy atmosphere there is a lack of sunshine and light, which can emulate feelings of sadness. As this symbol was typically recalled as appearing in the colour black an additional element of grieving or mourning can arise for this symbol from the idea of wearing black when someone has passed away. Common imagery from films can be recalled of taking a black umbrella to a funeral at a cemetery when it is raining. It can symbolize protestors part of the movement marching toward the funeral of reproductive rights because of the abortion law in Poland; the death of the women who die due to complications from an illegal abortion because no legal, medically-safe abortions were accessible; the death of the women who die while giving birth because the law forced them to continue the pregnancy; lastly, the death of a sick child which is forced to be born because of the law even though there was a high risk that it would not survive.

Notably, the umbrella symbol is always open when used in the movement's visual media. The act of keeping the umbrella open reinforces the idea that participants of the movement will not close their umbrellas until the rain stops and they will continue striking even through adverse conditions. This can further symbolize that they will not stop striking until the law is changed or until society changes.

> "It was this thing they said in Poland, 'nie składamy parasolek' ['we will not close our umbrellas']. We're not going to take them down …until we're done! Until you hear us, until you take us into account!" *– Interview 3*

Profile of a woman's face

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

The profile of a woman's face was one of the specific symbols designed by Polish illustrator Ola Jasionowska for the logo of the movement in 2016[3]. Repetition of this symbol in 2016 allowed there to be a direct connection to the work of the movement when the symbol was used in 2020. Analysis of the symbol looks at the lack of distinct facial features or skin colour which acts to portray a universal woman. This can represent how the movement is not only reflective of issues for Polish women, but for all women, and that all women's rights are under attack by this law. Another reading of this as a symbol suggests how the silhouette of the face is a historical reference to the type of hairstyle worn by women and portraiture style from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This further connects this symbol to the first wave of feminism which was a period where women in the Western world began fighting for the right to vote among other opportunities (Munro, 2013). This symbol therefore makes a call back to the history of women and the fight for rights.

> "I think about this silhouette as a shadow of the woman. […] Women in the past, but also right now, they don't have their own voice in the public area. Sometimes we have to hide behind the man, and we are like shadows. […] Also, it reminds me about old photographs and the first feminists. […] It's about the past, the present and the future. The problems from the past, we have the same problems today." – *Interview 11*

[3] Ola Jasionowska Behance portfolio, profile of woman's face. Available at: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/43423095/polish-women-on-strike/>.

Defining feminism as ‘waves’ has been challenged for imposing generational barriers on its participants where intersectionality and exclusion arise in the context of different historical moments in feminism and technological changes (Fotopoulou, 2016; Munro, 2013; Schuster, 2013). However, it is largely recognized that illuminating differences between women creates “situated knowledge [that] can help achieve solidary in a broad struggle against various oppressions” (Pruchniewska, 2016:739). This attention to acknowledging difference adds a sense of unity which can strengthen connections between social movement participants (Fotopoulou, 2016; Korolczuk, 2020; Pruchniewska, 2016). Unity among social movement participants implies shared goals and values which can also create a shared sense of hope for achieving the goals and change. This ties back into another analysis of this symbol focusing on the direction that the face is turned or pointed which implies a clockwise or forward motion. This can further be understood as a symbol for moving forward, progressing and looking ahead into the future where change through connective action is possible.

Lightning bolt

Figure 10.

Figure 11.

Figure 12.

The most common symbol that has been mentioned throughout the interview method is the lightning bolt specifically in the colour red. The lightning bolt as a symbol of the 2020 Women’s Strike in Poland movement was discussed by 10 out of 11 interviewees. Analyzing this 2D shape connected to runes and old language inscriptions where the symbol was used to mean a source of light, heat, and energy and therefore ‘sun’ or ‘lightning’ (Barnes, 2012:195). Common connotations deriving from lightning bolts were that they are a powerful natural force of energy that can be destructive, dangerous, or unpredictable, appear without warning during

a storm and are followed by the loudness of thunder.

> "It's about power, it's about voice, and it's about the energy of all of these strikes." – *Interview 11*

What this can symbolize is that the lightning bolt is a symbol of strength and power. At times, the strikes were organized spontaneously, and it was hard to know when and where the participants of the movement would strike next, reflecting this unpredictability of lightning. Another common connection was in seeing a storm filled with dark clouds, rain, and lightning, therefore building a symbolic idea of people coming together to unite for something. The darkness of a storm further connects to the anger felt and expressed by individuals within the movement about the law and government. The symbol is a warning to the Polish government about people not agreeing with this law and taking action against it.

> "It's strength. Nature is unpredictable. […] It's beautiful, it's powerful, but… you can't say what will happen. It's not about saying "we are dangerous", because the whole movement was a peace movement. It was not about violence or anything like that, it's more about … the *scale*. If you see that all these people are as lightning bolts, then you can say that was a huge storm going through all the country, because people were fighting for their rights." – *Interview 1*

Some critique has been raised about the lightning bolt symbol in the Women's Strike movement about it being similar looking to the SS symbol from the Nazi period. Like the lightning bolt symbol, the double 'sig' rune used as the SS symbol also has connection to old language inscriptions originally meaning source of light, heat, and energy (Barnes, 2012). This comment relating the Women's Strike and Nazi symbols has come from opponents of the Women's Strike movement including Polish media and public Facebook and Twitter comments observed online (Wądołowska, 2020). Interviewees of this study predominantly shared that they did not believe that the lightning bolt symbol used in the Women's Strike movement was meant to be associated with the SS symbol. Some interviewees had not even heard of this association until someone else referred to it in conversation or for example they observed it in online social media comments. Supporters of the movement counter that the lightning bolt symbol used in the Women's Strikes ultimately looks different from the SS symbol, and that those involved do not subscribe to the association of Nazi ideology within the movement (Wądołowska, 2020).

> "If you're asking if from the top of my head I'm thinking "Oh my god, it's a relation to Hitler or his supporters", no. No, I don't have any recollections like this. Actually, when I'm thinking about it right now it's overwhelmed by understanding that when it's written or painted on the walls or somewhere, then you can say that people who support Women's Strike, they were there. It just... it looks different." – *Interview 1*

Colour red

8 out of 11 interviewees listed red as a colour associated with the movement and specifically associated it with the lightning bolt symbol. A decision for using red is that it is a colour that can be used in contrast to other colours and stand out against them, thus grabbing people's attention. Rose suggests that colours can also be used to associate different symbolic meanings to an object (Rose, 2016:136). Interviewees discussed the colour red as being associated with feelings of anger which can reflect the emotional drive of individuals in the movement fighting for reproductive rights and feeling anger towards the government that made this law. Alternatively, the colour red was also seen as being symbolic of passion and love.

> "I feel that red is always about energy, also power... red is also the colour of love. It's positive thing here because for example, people who are against this protest, they are like, "you women who, go on strikes, you don't love your children because you want to kill them". And it's... so stupid. […] I know a lot of women who participate in strikes because they have children and they want to give them the future where they can choose what they want to do and who they want to be. So, it's also the colour of love and support." – *Interview 11*

Red is also a colour in the Polish flag and can thus be symbolic of Poland. Connections were also made to red as the colour of blood and thus a symbol for blood during menstruation, during abortions, or blood loss resulting in death. All of these connotations connect the colour red to the Women's Strike in Poland.

Collective meaning making and memory

The interviews revealed that while individuals are interpreting the symbols differently by expressing varying connotations, ultimately their interpretations of each symbol are very

similar. Highlighting that these contradictions of interpretations occurred offers insight on symbols having varying meanings, as well as showing where there is continuity in shared meaning. Ibrahim proposes that "images work through both individual imagination and collective-meaning making" (Ibrahim, 2009:94) which highlights how visuals depend on their users to be interpreted. This is for example evident in the *Handmaid's Tale* imagery which is representative of a recent television series which has gained popularity in viewership, making it identifiable within popular culture.

Another concept that can be applied to the association of specific symbols for movements is that of collective memory. As discussed by McGowan, collective memory offers "a means for publicly sharing and negotiating meaning through symbols" (McGowan, 2016:4). When it comes to the hanger, the collective memory of using the object for amateur abortions then transformed into a symbol used in historical reproductive rights movements allowed the symbol to garner a publicly established meaning. The hanger as a symbol was used across various cultural contexts in reproductive rights protests all over the world. Here, "collective memory constructs narratives that explain past conditions; in so doing, a group's collective memory can generate a response to contemporary issues" (McGowan, 2016:5). When the umbrella and woman's face symbols reappeared in the 2020 phase of the Women's Strike movement, they were recognizable as symbols that were associated with the 2016 phase of the movement. These symbols were already understood by participants of the movement, a specific group which were collectively part of a memorable event which was the 2016 phase of the Women's Strike. Collective meaning making and memory allows participants of a movement to identify associated symbols and use them in the movement. "Collective memory was associated with iconic symbols that helped activists make connections over time, space, and among themselves" (McGowan, 2016:7). Symbols and their meaning as understood by their users is especially important in digital environments where there is no obvious temporal relation between the protest and its medial representation, as with the lightning bolt symbol used in this movement.

The original design of the lightning bolt symbol used in the movement comes from Polish illustrator Ola Jasionowska who created the symbol as part of a logo for the first protests of the

movement in October 2016[4]. The intended meaning of the lightning bolt is that it "represents the power of women and is a warning to the government" says Jasionowska in an interview (Brown, 2020). The similarities between the meaning given to the lightning bolt symbol by its designer and the meanings created by its users adds an additional confirmation to the message communicated by this symbol. Most importantly however is that the symbol is identifiable of and associated with the movement. Through the repetition and visibility of symbols (Skaggs, 1994), social movement visuals become identifiable as part of a specific social movement. The lightning bolt, profile of a woman's face, umbrella, hanger, and *The Handmaid's Tale* reference are all repeating and memorable symbols that are part of the Women's Strike in Poland movement.

Replicable and ambiguous

For these symbols to be established, Goodnow's ascertained characteristics of symbols used within social movements can be applied, which include the ability to be replicated easily and containing a degree of ambiguity (Goodnow, 2006:170). All the symbols, but especially the lightning bolt had simple shapes which could be easily replicated. "In 2020 red lightning bolt became the individual symbol and I guess it's because of simplicity of shape and easy copying by protesters" (Jasionowska, 2020). Participants of the movement could easily draw or use the lightning bolt symbol in visual media, and it was seen in graphic design, illustrations, posters, banners, as pins or stickers, and drawn on windows, cardboard signs, clothing, and bodies (Appendix 9). People could also illustrate the lightning bolt themselves or paste it into in digital media and digital art (Appendix 9).

The lightning bolt symbol was also ambiguous and unique in that interviewees commented that they had not seen it in other social movements. Symbols in social movement visuals are used to signify more than the object they appear as. The ambiguity of the lightning bolt symbol and it being referenced in red disconnects it from being immediately associated with lightning. The importance of this symbol was that it communicated a meaning of being associated with the Women's Strike and was therefore identifiable by the supporters.

[4] Ola Jasionowska Behance portfolio, red lightning bolt. Available at: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/107612181/red-lightning-bolt/>.

> "This whole movement's visuals, media and branding has been so strong. […] The prominent symbol is the lightning bolt strike. […] It's been so defining. […] Right away, you can identify what it is. […] When I think of the Women's Strike movement in Poland that's the first symbol that comes to mind." – *Interview 10*

ONLINE ACTIVISM AND SHARING THE SYMBOLS

The symbols of the Women's Strike in Poland movement appeared in and were identifiable in online and offline visual media. As mentioned in the earlier section, the movement symbols appeared digitally in 2D graphic design work, illustrations, and multi-media art. At in-person mobilizations the symbols appeared on posters, banners, cardboard signs, clothing, pins, stickers, as drawings on people's bodies, or as objects held by protesters. Photography of in-person mobilization and related events included this visual media, and the photographs were then reshared digitally and circulated online. Most interviewees did not create their own visual media or content for the movement. Interviewees reflected on seeing a lot of various visual media as part of the movement and suggested that supporters of the movement contributed to the creation of visual media with whatever skills they had in order to get involved. This included everything from drawing a lightning bolt symbol on a cardboard sign to digital art made by professional graphic designers, or professional and amateur photographers or anyone with their phone at the protests capturing the event (Appendix 9). Users of the symbols included these creators who are aware of the symbol's association to the Women's Strike in Poland movement. Symbols within the visual media work to identify the movement.

> "Seeing it everywhere, over this past fall and summer, […] seeing such a heavy presence on socials and in the news and everything, […] it just was so powerful and so clear. […] I feel like a lot of times when you saw a visual, then you saw the lightning bolt in the corner. […] You can instantly tell what cause it was supporting." – *Interview 10*

All interviewees saw symbols relevant to the movement and most interviewees shared visual media and content about the movement online. To discuss how the symbols and visual media were used in the movement, interviewees were asked about when and how they first learned about the Women's Strike in Poland movement. Most interviewees answered that they learned

about and got information about the movement online and specifically from the social media platforms Instagram and Facebook. Interviewees mainly saw articles or posts regarding the movement from news sources, organizations supporting the movement, individuals they followed, or friends and family. Of the interviewees, 4 out of 11 were aware of the movement in 2016 but all were mainly familiar with the 2020 presence of the movement. 8 out of 11 interviewees expressed feeling presently involved in the movement.

Their involvement included participating online through creating or sharing relevant content and information and participating in person by taking part in mobilizations and creating visual media to bring to these events. Most interviewees shared visual media and content about the movement specifically on their Instagram and Facebook accounts. In this case the data suggests that the platform chosen did not make a difference in how individuals were sharing information and visual media. However, this is an aspect that could be further explored to better account for the affordances of different social media platforms as well as their popularity and use dependent on the cultural context. The data predominantly showed that more individuals were using Instagram to reshare other stories and posts that showed information and visual media about the movement. As Leaver, Highfield and Abidin discuss, Instagram is a popular image-dominant social media platform that prioritizes featuring visuals on the application interface (Leaver et al., 2020). The preference for using Instagram over other platforms to share this content was also expressed by multiple interviewees.

> "I write poems about the strikes and other signs connected to the symbols of strikes and post it on my Instagram […] Internet is the perfect area to show your support. […] My friend who was pregnant in 2020, she was like, "thank you for posting your poems, because I can share it on my Instagram and show my support like this." […] I created something which is important also for other people and it's the way they can support the Polish strike, even if they can't go to the crowd and so on. […] I was really proud that we can do something else than only going for strikes." – *Interview 11*

For some people, in-person mobilization may not be an option or way to show their support in a movement because of personal health concerns for example, and so online activism allows safe and effective ways to participate. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, public gathering restrictions were globally introduced. It is in such cases where restrictions may arise which prevent or disrupt the ability for in-person mobilization to be organized, and online activism

can thus act as an alternative for participation. Despite restrictions, in-person mobilization events were still organized for the 2020 Women's Strike. Countries mentioned by the interviewees where these events were organized included Poland, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Germany where individuals attended strikes, marches, and demonstrations despite the ongoing pandemic.

> "It wasn't so easy to get people together when there's COVID. […] It was really amazing that people get to the moment when they thought that […] this is so unfair what Polish government is doing, that... they can even risk their lives. They go out, and strike about it and talk about it. That this is something even more important than your health." – *Interview 8*

The immense amount of people attending these mobilizations during the pandemic (Nacher, 2020) shows the scale of support for the movement and reflects the dedication of individuals in supporting the movement in this way and risking their health despite public gathering restrictions. However, risking one's health or the health of others is not a possibility for some, and the pandemic was still a major deterrent for people to physically attend the mobilizations.

> "It's a lot of personal issues or things [...] that impact why they are going or not. […] If anyone has […] older or… sicker at home, they, even though they were supporting Women's Strike 100%, they didn't want to risk their health. So... there were different people, different approaches only because of the conditions of coronavirus." – *Interview 1*

People who were unable to attend in-person mobilizations still participated in the movement by putting visual media with symbols like banners and posters on their balconies or windows, and by sharing information and visuals media related to the movement online. Ultimately, if an individual is restricted from mobilizing physically, if they have a device and internet connection then online activism is an alternative way that they can show support for and participate in the movement. Social media platforms provide the space for this exchange of ideas and discussion relevant to the movement to occur.

> "I was thinking a lot about the role that the social platforms have in the strikes in Poland. […] Protests are not happening only locally in a specific place at a specific time, but also the internet gives us this ability to express ourselves all the time and keep the discussion going. […] This reality of the protest is happening all the time in this virtual space. So, as much as I want to participate in

an actual protest, I will also want to participate in this protest that is happening online." – *Interview 4*

In relation to accessibility of participation, Mendes et al. (2018) suggest that online activism provides "important spaces for a wider range of [people] (in relation to age, ability, race and other factors) to participate in public debates" (Mendes et al., 2018:244). This widespread ability for communication through the internet also allows the participation and support of people from countries other than Poland. This global extension of the network society is thanks to technology's ability for high distribution (Castells, 2007). In this study, the wide-reaching, high distribution of content is mainly through the use of Instagram and Facebook. The reason for participating online by sharing content was largely due to interviewees supporting the movement. Being on location in Poland and at in-person mobilizations for example allowed some participants to document and share a localized perspective.

> "I have an Instagram profile and some of my followers are international. So, for me, it's important that I can show my perspective to someone, […] mostly to those people who do not know what is going on here, or they only read about it in press or seen on TV. […] It is important to give people access to this 'insider information', let's say, to show people how the protest looks from my perspective, as a person inside, and who is protesting." – *Interview 4*

Interviewees shared content online to build awareness about the situation in Poland and how other people could get involved in protesting against the abortion law. A strength of online activism in this movement was that people living anywhere could participate in the movement and participation was not limited to a specific location. Even though they were distanced, individuals showed their affiliation and support of the movement. The spreading of awareness of the movement resulted in mobilization events around the world. In some cases, these were organized by Polish diaspora and members of Polish communities outside of Poland that supported the movement, for example in Canada.

> "Through my involvement, I've met a lot of people in Toronto, specifically in the Polish community, who like myself, are very committed to our culture and our country, even though we don't live there. […] we still feel this connection and social cause to […] support from afar. […] The first time I heard about [Women's Strike] was through […] Instagram, mainly from Poland, just people [sharing] images and then posting the marches and everything. Then that kind of spiraled into organizing something here in Toronto." – *Interview 10*

Another reason for circulating this content from their personal social media accounts was that interviewees wanted to show their stance about the movement and express their support. This was especially important for interviewees who identified as Polish but are living outside of Poland.

> "Because of my exchange and then my work in Sweden, I started having friends from abroad. I just wanted to show that I'm part of [the movement]. That I'm not separating myself from this issue even though I'm abroad. [...] I want to show also something about my personal feelings and my perspective." – *Interview 1*

In some cases, interviewees expressed a fear that if they did not share their supportive stance on the movement other people would make assumptions about their stance, including that they were pro the abortion law or otherwise indifferent and did not care enough to spread awareness about the movement.

> "I have this patriotism feeling [...], I want to be proud of my roots and not ashamed that the whole world is watching this. […] I also have this urge of wanting to show where *I* am standing in this, towards friends and other people. […] I had this fear in the beginning like, people would think, "Oh, she's Polish. so she's against abortions"." – *Interview 3*

In her 2020 work *Affective Publics: Solidarity and Distance*, Papacharissi underscores that "information and technology alone cannot mend […] distance" (Papacharissi, 2020:10). Distance is something we are confronted with daily when we see content online about global events. While technologies enable individuals to amplify their voices and to network, "it is our stories that connect us, identify us, and ultimately divide us" (Ibid.). Here, solidarity emerges in this type of engagement with attention to affect. "It is a public display of affect that unite, identifies, or disconnects" (Papacharissi, 2015:2).

Dahlgren and Hill argue that engaging "with the media in the context of politics, society and culture […] means more than being taken up with, diverted by, or reactive to a cultural artefact or event." It "is a significant psychological investment in something […] that matters in that moment and/or over a longer […] time" (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020). Participating in the Women's Strike movement by way of sharing content online and attending mobilizations in person is a testament of this type of engagement which is further underpinned by the notion of affect. In

relation to engagement, affect "can be seen as […] collective emotionality that connects with people's shared social experiences; affect animates engagement and helps motivate participation." (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020). Raising awareness about the movement by sharing related content online and expressing that they supported the movement was also how interviewees established connections with other individuals who were in support of the movement. As discussed, symbols and visual media can assist in identification and associated meaning. Seeing symbols related to the Women's Strike movement online shared by others allowed individuals to feel connected due to shared support of the movement. Spreading awareness of a movement online supports network building as well as group formation through solidarity and connection.

> "That's how I showed solidarity and spreading the word. […] Not only that picture-perfect Instagram bullshit, but that there's actual things going on outside of these little squares."
>
> – *Interview 6*

NETWORKS CONNECTED THROUGH SHARED VALUES

Online community and shared values

Through sharing and seeing visual media and content about the Women's Strike movement online, interviewees felt part of the online community of the movement. These connections between individuals that are part of the movement can be established through uniting over shared feelings or common values of the movement. Shared feelings included uniting over a sense of injustice about the law and showing solidarity for those impacted by the law. As the law restricts abortion access and, in some cases, criminalizes pregnant women who do not carry their pregnancy to term (Korolczuk, 2017:2), women are directly impacted by the law. Shared values of the movement that connected individuals supporting the movement included valuing body and reproductive autonomy, and therefore a right to choice, and access to legal abortion. This also included shared values of women's rights and gender equality.

The beginning of the Women's Strike movement in 2016 was a response to the abortion ban proposal and the movement was largely pro-abortion and mainly focused on supporting abortion rights (Gober, 2017). Over the years, the movement has grown to include more perspectives and grown beyond only being about abortion rights (Molek-Kozakowska & Wanke, 2019). Individuals supporting the movement have different perspectives on abortion, where some are pro abortion rights with no restrictions, for example. Other participants are in support of abortion rights to some extent where they believe there should be some control by the government in stating the cases where legal abortion is possible. Today, Poland as a nation is polarized in their views of abortion, and some people believe that there needs to be a law that accommodates both perspectives. Ultimately, despite difference of opinion on abortion, participants are still part of the same movement fighting for the law to change to allow at least some access to legal abortion. Thus, another shared value of the Women's Strike in Poland movement is about the freedom of choice for individuals who can become pregnant to be able to do what they want with their bodies, including terminating a pregnancy. Therefore, the movement also supports women's rights and gender equality.

> "It's one of the most important things in my life right now. […] I'm a young woman and I want to become a mother in the near future. […] I feel fully involved in these protests. But I think it's not about me as a young woman, it's also about people who will live in Poland in the future, for my children and my grandchildren, for example. […] I'm really sad that we have to fight for this, but on the other hand, I feel that it's really important that we feel that we are a huge group who wants to be free and who wants to have their own voice." – *Interview 11*

The aspect of gender equality as a value within this community of movement participants emphasizes the belief in wanting equality towards all individuals no matter their gender, and that all individuals should have the same freedoms and rights. Gender equality and the advocacy of women's rights are at the core of feminism, and this movement can therefore also connect to supporting feminism.

> "At the base, it's a feminist movement, it's [...] putting women on an equal plane with men and having the right to choose to have or not have a child, and all the conditions related to that." – *Interview 9*

Specific to the Women's Strike in Poland is the shared idea among its supporters of patriarchal power dictating the rights and freedoms of women. The movement allows the oppressed group to express their voice and opposition, in this case women who have their right of choice removed.

> "This is not only about abortion. It's about men controlling women. […] No one is telling men what they are supposed to do. […] It's about women's rights in general, […] controlling their own bodies and making their own decisions, not based on a government full of old men." – *Interview 3*

Contesting feminism

Feminism in Poland is a contested subject and stereotypes exist regarding it. In relation to the Women's Strike movement, the interview empirical data suggests that people are hesitant to label it as feminist. Some interviewees and many people in Poland do not see the Women's Strike as a feminist movement. Interviewees believe that not everyone taking part in the movement defines themselves as a feminist, and some interviewees involved in it are also not calling themselves feminists.

> "All of them would not identify themselves as feminists. This is kind of a controversial subject. In Poland […] it's so negatively associated." – *Interview 3*

There is a stigma surrounding feminism in Poland. Considering the cultural and social context of Poland, the stigma can come from conservative practices related to religion as well as stereotypes in popular culture. In general, there is a stigma of feminism in today's society which comes from misogyny or an illiberal view of gender norms like hegemonic masculinity (Gill, 2016; Korolczuk, 2020). However, feminism has also never before enjoyed such popular support in the world (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Gill, 2016; Keller & Ringrose, 2015). Ultimately, the values in the Women's Strike movement correspond to the definition of feminism and the values that feminism supports. This movement can therefore also be seen as an opportunity for individuals that did not identify as feminists before participating in the movement to see feminism in a positive or non-stereotypical way.

The network of the movement and connections within it allow for the possibility of discussions. Interviewees expressed that the movement and values it supported allowed them to reflect on their own values and ways of identifying. Individuals participating in the movement were able to share their view on issues pertinent to the movement and the points that they supported. Opportunities to communicate with individuals with different perspectives that felt differently than them about certain points were possible because of the connections offered through the movement's networks.

> "The strikes are opportunity to say that feminism, it's something *positive*. […] For women who thought before the strikes that they aren't feminists […] they realized that, "I'm a feminist because I want to have a choice, and that's about my rights and about my freedom. […] It's not about 'I'm against the men', but I'm pro my choice and my partner's choice" […] My husband was with me on every strike and said that it's also for his rights. For example, when I will get pregnant, it will be also his child, and also his choice." – *Interview 11*

Feminism is a contested concept, and whether participants negotiate their identities by labeling themselves as a feminist or not does not delimit the values shared and supported within the movement. As discussed, these kinds of struggles or challenges are an integral part of feminism (Korolczuk, 2020; Pruchniewska, 2016) and of politics and democracy in the way that they identify groups (McGarry et al., 2020:15). In acknowledging different perspectives especially in Polish society, Korolczuk also underscores that "contemporary struggles around "gender" should be interpreted as a conflict between different types of knowledges and truths on equality, sexuality, and reproduction, rather than simply as a case of progressive opposition to ignorance." (Korolczuk, 2020). In discussing participation in social movements and solidarity, Butler also attests that "we do not have to love one another to engage in meaningful solidarity" (Butler, 2020:139) implying that individuals do not all need to have the same values to support the same movement.

Connection through solidarity

Allyship and solidarity are also part of the connection that happens within the movement between participants since not only women are participating in the movement and supporting women's rights.

> "I am a husband and I feel that it's very important that I be there representing other men and other husbands, and also to fight for my wife and for her future. There's this sense of duty to be there." – *Interview 4*

Participants support the movement because they want to support their spouses or individuals that the law directly concerns, and the data suggests that community building occurs from this and that connections between participants are fostered because of these shared values. Hemmings' (2012) concept of affective solidarity focuses on the experience of affective dissonance, which she argues is central to feminism (Hemmings, 2012:154). Affective dissonance is "theorised as the basis of a connection to others and desire for transformation" (Hemmings, 2012:154). In her exploration of the Women's Strike movement prior to 2020, Korolczuk refers to Hemmings' affective dissonance as something experienced by the movement's participants (Korolczuk, 2020:710). It can thus be applied to the feelings of solidarity participants experienced in the Women's Strike movement.

> "Personally, identifying as a gay male, and having a government that came after my rights and my friends' rights who identify as LGBTQ+ in Poland, [...] I could relate in terms of also being a minority and in a group […] that was targeted in Poland by the government. I felt a solidarity with women who were having their rights revoked. [...] Having Polish women in my life, I want to show allyship and show up for them. […] If you believe in humanity and equality and justice, then that's something that you should show up for. Add your voice because that's essentially how change is evoked. Being silent is almost like being compliant. […] I think even if it doesn't affect you directly, we have a duty to show solidarity and support women and other marginalized groups." – *Interview 10*

In line with affective solidarity and affective dissonance, Clark (2016) argues that all movements and the individuals participating in them require hope and ways of reimaging hope in order to endure whatever reality they are facing. In this case, interviewees discussed how participants of the movement are unhappy with the state of Polish society and the restrictions that the government is introducing, like this law, and want to make their opposition heard. Ultimately, they have hope that together and through action like spreading awareness about the movement and getting people involved, that things will change. Clark (2016) argues that hope is created for people through these networked forms of solidarity and also for these participants to feel part of a larger cause and community.

> "It turns out that there are all these people and they fight for the same things as you. When there is a group of people which believes in the same values, that's when the community happens. So yeah, I definitely feel connected with this community." – *Interview 4*

Individuals can furthermore be connected to the movement as Polish citizens. Whether they have Polish citizenship, live in Poland, have family or friends living there, or otherwise connect to a Polish identity in some way, supporting the movement means that they oppose a law that the Polish government has set. Participants of the movement see a problem with the law and the government that passed it, and therefore voice their opinions about the government in order create change in Poland.

> "Sometimes I am very ashamed of it. When I see what is happening here, I just don't understand some of my government's ideas and some behavior of people that are in power here. […] I really don't like what is happening here in my country. I have family in Poland and my friends are from here. I have people that I love here." – *Interview 8*

Church and state

Poland's individuals are polarized in their beliefs and values, which results in groups of people in support of the movement and those against it. A large portion of the opposition to the movement support the Catholic belief that abortion should not be practiced or legal, and therefore support the government's implementation of the abortion law. With another large portion of Poland's population in support of the movement and access to legal abortion, a problem arises in changing the perspective of those in opposition to the movement. Interviewees shared that as supporters of the movement they had a difficult time communicating with people opposed to the movement and making them understand why the movement is important and should be supported. Most interviewees shared that they personally know someone in their network, including a friend or family member that does not support the movement because of their religion or conservative beliefs.

> "I've tried to have the conversation and be like, it's so basic, but it's not your body. How could you decide over someone else's body even if you have these religious opinions? [...] It's hard to

> argue with someone who is so... emotionally invested in something. […] Any facts or sound opinions that I might give as arguments, they just sort of disappear." – *Interview 2*

Another interviewee shared that this stemmed from individuals feeling part of a community within their church and religion and not wanting to risk separating themselves from this group by going against the group's beliefs (Interview 3). This suggests that faith becomes an obstacle to the opportunities for discussions to occur so that perspectives can be shared.

> **"**I'm a feminist. I feel that […] freedom is the most important thing. […] But, I feel like a huge part of my family is against these values and [...] they think that God's Catholic church, our Polish values, and so on, are the most important. I grew up in this world, and for me, it's like two different areas. I have to cope with that. [...] I feel that a lot of women during the strikes… they felt lost like, "I'm Catholic, but I'm also pro freedom, pro choice"." – *Interview 11*

The fact is that individuals are still participating in the movement even though they identify as Catholic. Interviewees expressed the importance of Polish citizens that have a right to vote in needing to learn about the issues that the movement addresses and educate themselves before deciding that they are against it. There is ultimately a need for communication and discussion in this society where political support is so polarized. Part of this polarization stems from the Polish government's connection to the Catholic church, where Catholicism is the current and traditionally dominant religion in Poland (Nowicka et al., 2020). Interviewees in the study and scholars (Korolczuk & Saxonberg, 2014; 2016; 2017; Król et al., 2018; Molek-Kozakowska et al., 2019; Nowicka et al., 2020) have criticized this relationship due to it having an influence on the country's laws, thus prioritizing religious beliefs over human rights like body autonomy. One participant expressed that "right now, it seems like it's becoming a very restrictive environment in Poland" (Interview 9).

In some ways, the movement also highlights the expressions of Polish individuals in wanting their government to separate from the Catholic church. Interviewees expressed that many people believe that the Polish government should not be making laws that are influenced by the beliefs of the Catholic church or generally any religion. Democracy identifies a need for a government to listen to civil opinion where citizens can feel accurately represented by their government and the decisions it makes. With social movements like the Women's Strike

experiencing such great shows of support in recent Polish history due to online activism, the opportunity for change to occur in Polish society remains in sight.

> "Our country might face the situation that people are going to just leave because they are that unhappy, or that scared, or they hate standards that we are putting up. We might lose a lot. […] In Poland we have a lot of amazing qualities as people, as a society, as a country itself. But our potential... it's getting lost. […] It's a much deeper problem. We need to think about who's going to represent us in government and then we can identify ourselves with politicians that are there making decisions on our behalf." – *Interview 1*

V. CONCLUSION

This analysis of the role of isolated and identifiable symbols within a contemporary social movement contributes new research to the media and communications field in connection to the study of visual media and social movements. Using the case study of the Women's Strike in Poland enabled me to facilitate an exploration of the role of symbols and visual media in online activism in relation to building networks and connection. First, the role of communicating information about a movement and acting to identify it emphasized that images have meaning, and that the users of the visuals interpret symbols based on the context that they exist in. Then the role of generating awareness for a movement was determined through examining how symbols and visual media are created and shared in both online and offline spaces. Finally, the role of symbols and visual media to build networks and encourage connection was identified.

Lightning bolt, profile of a woman's face, umbrella, hanger, The Handmaid's Tale

The visual analysis method examined the visual media used in the Women's Strike in Poland, and 5 symbols were determined as repeating frequently within the visual media. These included the lightning bolt, profile of a woman's face, umbrella, hanger, and *The Handmaid's Tale* imagery. In applying Barthes and semiotics to this analysis, the symbols are visuals that their users apply meaning to within a certain context. Some of these symbols like the hanger and *The Handmaid's Tale* imagery have appeared in other movements around the world related to reproductive rights and women's rights. This suggests that the meaning of these symbols is understood as being associated with these types of movements. The Women's Strike movement supports reproductive rights and women's rights which explains the use of the symbols of a hanger and *The Handmaid's Tale* imagery in the movement.

Visuals can also "shrink distance and temporality between the event and spectator where the circulation of iconic images create collective identification with an event producing a […] memory" (Ibrahim, 2009:97). Symbols related to these concepts of collective meaning making and memory as outlined by Ibrahim (2009) are the umbrella and profile of a woman's face. These symbols first appeared in the visual media of the 2016 phase of the Women's Strike

movement. Their repeated use in the 2020 phase of the movement demonstrates that symbols can be used to recall events where their previous association was established.

The symbol that was analyzed as the most used symbol for the Women's Strike in Poland is the lightning bolt, which has appeared prominently in the 2020 phase of the movement. A characteristic of the lightning bolt symbol which allowed it to appear in and be circulated easily is that it was an easily replicable symbol. This allowed its users, namely the participants and supporters of the movement, to replicate the symbol and create their own visual media that included the lightning bolt. The lightning bolt was also described as being unique in identifying the Women's Strike movement as many interviewees had not seen this symbol in other movements.

The empirical data from the interview method revealed that while individuals interpret the symbols with varying degrees of differences, ultimately their understanding of each of the 5 symbols is grounded in its association with the Women's Strike movement. Highlighting the presence of contradictions in interpretations offers insight into the continuity and disruptions of meanings that visual artefacts of social movements like symbols can have. The importance of these findings is that specific symbols represent the Women's Strike in Poland. Additionally, these symbols are identifiable by individuals that use the symbol, that participate in the movement, and even by those outside of the movement who do not support it.

Symbols, networks, and connection in social movements

Goodnow's exploration of symbols used within social movements were applicable to this study in that the symbols of the Women's Strike movement are used because they can communicate a message, they can work to identify a movement, and they can bring awareness to the issue that the movement supports (Goodnow, 2006). Symbols were articulated in visual media in both online and offline spaces in the Women's Strike movement and were used to identify it. Offline, the symbols and visual media appeared at sites of strikes, marches, and protests mainly on signage, and as objects to be held or worn.

In 2020, in-person mobilization events for the movement were organized in Poland and other countries mentioned by the interviewees like Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and

Germany. In instances like the currently ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic or being located outside of the country where the movement is centralized, opportunities for the organization of in-person mobilization can be limited. Thus, online activism, enabled by the advances of technology that allow for this global communication and exchange of ideas, can be critical for gaining participants for a movement. Its strength is that individuals can participate anytime and anywhere in the "protest that is happening in this virtual space" (Interview 4).

The symbols and visual media that are used in the Women's Strike are thus also circulated online. Here, the symbols and visual media appeared mainly as digital art and social media posts. The interviewees in this study mainly used Instagram and Facebook as platforms for sharing this visual content and information about the movement with their networks. Online activism worked in this movement through participants sharing the symbols and visual media to spread awareness about the Women's Strike in Poland, and to express personal support of the movement through this type of engagement.

These symbols and visual media are also used to connect individuals that are a part of the movement in these networks that are built through participation. Despite the differences of living outside of Poland or in Poland, or of having varying beliefs and perspectives, individuals came together to support the movement. These networks and connections were mainly based on having shared values. The shared values among individuals participating in and supporting the movement include body autonomy, supporting the right to choose to have an abortion, and therefore supporting access to legal abortion. As well, women's rights including gender equality were part of what the movement supported. Hemmings' affective dissonance and affective solidarity can be applied to theorize this shared connection and motivation among individuals for participating in a movement (Hemmings, 2012). This concept identifies that individuals come together in networks and that their connections are guided by the common goal of inciting social and societal change. These networks also included individuals who were not directly impacted by the law, as in those who cannot get pregnant. For example, men still participated in the movement to support its aims and to show solidarity and allyship with women. In these networks, individuals were connected due to sharing similar values and uniting over supporting the movement.

Due to Poland's historically strong ties to Catholicism, opposition to the movement is largely rooted in conservative religious beliefs. Interviewees expressed that when advocating for the

Women's Strike or discussing it with others, these religious or conservative beliefs were challenging for those individuals to disregard or alter. In this sense, the qualitative data implies that through the sharing of movement visuals, these visuals become sites of conflict. The symbols carry meanings of representing the movement, and individuals opposed to the movement can protest the symbols in the instances that they appear by showing their dissent towards the movement. The individuals who share the visuals of the movement can speak up for and advocate for the meaning of the symbols which have a role in representing the values and goals of the movement. What this research suggests is that visuals in the Women's Strike in Poland work as a conversation starter for those outside of and inside of the network of individuals participating in the movement.

The circulation of symbols created an opportunity for individuals to communicate with each other, mainly through bringing awareness to the movement and connecting over shared values. Alongside this, the movement offered a chance for individuals to have challenging conversations around religion, beliefs, rights, and values. In general, in interviewees' personal lives, the movement was a catalyst to have these discussions with those around them, and to try to share their own perspective. Interviewees expressed that they believe that people with differing perspectives about the common values within the movement can still strike together and support a common goal. The findings revealed that individuals who identify as Catholic participated in in-person mobilizations and supported the movement. This emphasizes that supporters of the movement can come together to support the same cause even if their personal and religious beliefs are in conflict.

Going forward

The findings also revealed that values supported by the individuals of the movement, like gender equality and women's rights reflect feminism. As discussed by the interviewees, feminism appears to be a stigmatized term in Poland where it does not experience the same support in Poland as in other parts of the world (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Gill, 2016; Keller et al., 2015). This was an interesting aspect to identify early on in the research and allowed me to be reflexive in the approach for the literature review and the concepts explored in the analysis of this study. A limitation I experienced in conducting this research was narrowing down the concepts to focus on in the literature review and the analysis. Initially, the concept of networked

feminism was selected to be in focus, but due to the contested views of feminism expressed by the interviewees, the aspect of solidarity was focused on more broadly to include critical discussions of feminism which could be applied to the analysis of the findings.

Many of the interviewees in this research discussed feelings and emotion in terms of their understanding of visuals in the movement as well as in terms of connections with other participants of the movement. A further exploration of this research can include the study of affect in relation to political engagement in the discipline of media and communication studies. Affect is a concept of increasing interest in the study of social movements (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020; Hemmings, 2012; Korolczuk, 2020; Papacharissi, 2015, 2020) which this research only began to explore due to limitations in the concepts applied to the study. More research is needed to understand the aspects of emotion as well as affect in connection to the use of symbols and visual media in social movements.

At the time of this research, the Women's Strike movement against the abortion law in Poland is ongoing. Although the abortion law was passed in Poland on 27 January 2021, women in Poland still seek and undergo abortions (Nowicka et al., 2020). Although the risk in receiving an abortion is greater when this activity is illegal in some instances, Polish citizens are proving that the law is not enough to stop them from acting on and advocating for the freedom of choice, body autonomy, and their reproductive rights. While there is pressure from anti-choice groups on the current ruling party, PiS, to enforce even more restrictions surrounding the abortion law (Nowicka et al., 2020), the empirical data of this research allows an optimism for future change. As the 2020 in-person mobilizations led by online activism were historical in scale of participation (Nacher, 2020), the Women's Strike is an example of expressing the desire for societal change that is demonstrated by a group in context. Another aspect to this sense of hope is that activism and mobilization in 2020 was notably led by young people (Korolczuk, 2020; Nacher, 2020). This implies that the younger generation and population of Polish citizens have a chance to elect different representation for their government in the upcoming election. The next parliamentary election in Poland is in 2023. As expressed by the interviewees in this study, electing a government that can better represent the values of its people may be the key to seeing changes to the abortion law and public opinion in Poland regarding reproductive rights and women's rights.

Using the Women's Strike in Poland as a case study examined the role of symbols and visual media in this movement as building meaning, awareness, networks, and connection. What this research confirms is that symbols in social movements support and encourage mobilization in both the online and offline sense. The importance of studying visuals in social movements is that it provides knowledge and understanding that can be applied to future social movements. This research demonstrates that symbols and visual media in social movements support marginalized groups and amplify their voices to incite social and societal change.

FIGURES

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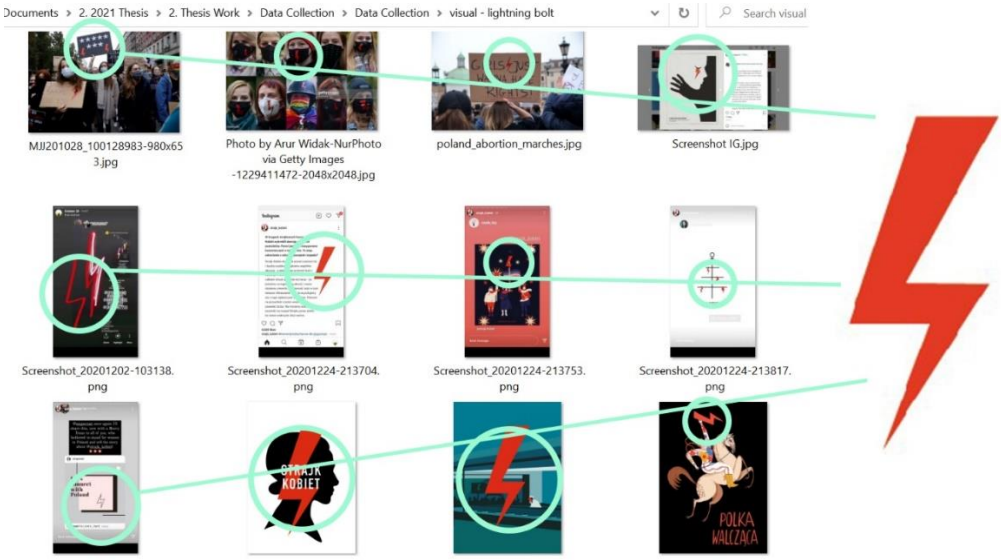
APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Visual Analysis Data Collection

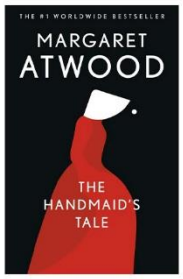
Initial Observations and Data Collection			
Category	*Number of visual media texts*	**Subcategory Symbol**	*Seen this symbol in other movements?*
Visual = 13 Subcategories	23	lightning bolt	No
	14	profile of woman's face	Not this style specifically but in general yes
	12	umbrella	Yes (Hong Kong protests)
	12	coat hanger	Yes (reproductive rights movements)
	7	Handmaid's Tale reference	Yes (reproductive rights movements)
	5	female body	Yes (reproductive rights movements)
	3	middle finger	Yes (other protests)
	3	two fingers peace sign	Yes (other protests)
	2	PW anchor	Yes
	2	rainbow	Yes (LGBTQ+ movements)
	1	Moomin character	Unsure
	2	cemetery candles	Unsure
	2	Venus symbol	Yes (women's rights movements)
	Total: 88		
Text = 6 Subcategories	1	Strajk Kobiet	No
	3	PiS off	No
	3	8 asterisk or Jebać PiS	No
	3	Wypierdalać or To Jest Wojna	No
	1	Konstytucja	Unsure
	1	Piekło Kobiet	No
	Total: 12		

Screenshot is showing data collection through folders. Table is showing initial observations through data collection.



Example of identifying a symbol within visual media texts in order to build subcategories.

Appendix 2 – Visual Analysis Sample



A B C D E

A & B. Jasionowska, Ola. (2016). Original illustration. Source: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/43423095/polish-women-on-strike/>.

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Appendix 3 – Visual Analysis

Symbol	**Denotation**	**Connotation**	**Myth**
This 2D shape: 	**S shape**	Like inscriptions from old language (Greek or Norse for example)	Symbols mean "sun". This is about a language symbol for light and source of heat and energy.
			Connections to SS symbol with double 'sig' or *Sieg* "victory" logo in Nazi period.
	Lightning Bolt shape. Lightning bolt is a visible electric discharge from a cloud. Lightning is a natural phenomenon.	Powerful force of nature and energy that can be destructive or dangerous.	Strong and powerful. Full of energy. Can symbolize strength and power.
			Connecting to Greek mythology and Zeus using lightning bolts as weapon
		Lightning strike appears almost without warning during a storm and is unpredictable.	Connecting this to the people within the movement, sometimes the strikes were organized spontaneously. You don't know when they will strike next

		You see lightning and then you hear thunder. Lightning strike or flash symbolizes that it is about to be loud.	Connecting this to the movement, the lightning can symbolize that this voice of the people is coming.
		Seeing a storm coming filled with dark clouds, rain, and lightning. Storms when connected to people can symbolize anger. You have a cloud over your head and it is making you upset or angry.	Connecting this to the people in the movement who are angry about the law and angry with the government.
	Electricity	Electric box or something that holds a lot of electricity might have this sign on it to warn people of the dangers of high voltage	Connecting to the danger that the movement will bring - the people in the movement want to identify that they are angry with the law and demand change, or they will keep striking. The symbol is a warning to the government about the Polish people not agreeing with this law.
			Connecting to superhero Flash, or Harry Potter because of the lightning scar. Powerful fictional characters.
	Colour black	Darkness, shadow, no light, no colour.	Sadness
			Anger
Red as a symbol of the movement as seen for example in the following symbol: 	**Colour red**	When a person is angry their face can flush, so the colour red can be used to show anger.	Anger of the people within the movement who are angry with the law and the Polish government.
		Bright colour. Stands out in contrast against other colours. The colour is demanding to look at with our eyes.	Strength
			Noticeable colour that will stand out against other colours. Noticeable colour to use when in a crowd.
		Blood, heart and other organs are this colour.	Heart as a symbol for love and passion. Symbolizing the love that individuals have in the movement for those they are supporting or showing solidarity for.
			Menstruation involves blood and is something the female body and reproductive system do. Menstruation occurs when the woman is not pregnant. This can connect the colour red to the movement by connecting to females and their freedom of choice to be pregnant. Red can also be connected to females or femininity in

			general because of this.
			Abortions involves blood and are connected to pregnancy which is connected to the female body and reproductive system. This can connect the colour red to the movement by connecting to females and their freedom of choice to be pregnant, and right to terminate a pregnancy.
			Loss of blood can result in death. It can further symbolize lives lost perhaps in war to fight for a cause.
		Red is a colour on the Polish flag	Connected to the country of Poland.
		Political association with socialist, communism, Soviet Union, fascist, or right-wing group.	Negative association with these kinds of political beliefs or parties.
Umbrella 	**Umbrella** is a tool that people use to shield themselves from the rain	Keep this object open on a rainy day	Connects to one of the first strikes for this movement in 2016, when a strike was scheduled on a day where it was rainy, and so hundreds of people filled the streets to strike with open umbrellas. This image was so powerful that it is a memory of an event connecting
			The act of keeping the umbrella open reinforces the idea that participants of the movement will not close their umbrellas until the rain stops, or, they will not stop striking until the law is changed.
		Rainy days are gloomy and cold typically	Sadness
			Common imagery from films of taking a black umbrella to a funeral at a cemetery when it is raining. This means that black umbrellas can symbolize grieving, death, and funerals. This can further refer to the law being a death sentence to women, or protestors part of the movement marching toward the funeral of their rights. It can also be tied to the death of a sick child born because of the law that will not survive.
	Colour black noted as commonly associated with this umbrella symbol	Darkness, no light, no colour	
			Anger
Hanger	**Hanger** is a tool used to hang clothing. Can be	Connected to hanging clothing that you are not meant to store folded, like coats or dresses.	Clothing can be an object connected to women who are stereotypically seen in society as focusing on their appearance including what they wear. As this connects

	made of wire for example. It is a common household object		to women, the object can also connect to the movement.
		Since it is made of wire and is common in households, people had access to these objects. In order to perform an illegal abortion, or abortion at home, sometimes these wire hangers were deconstructed so that the wire could be used to insert into the vagina to kill or remove a fetus in order to terminate a pregnancy. While this was a typically free procedure, it was a health risk as it could be performed by anyone (not necessarily a medical professional), was not guaranteed to terminate a pregnancy, could result in a lot of blood loss or result in bodily damage or infection.	As this object is connected to abortion and the lengths that people go to in order to perform an abortion, it connected to the movement. This is a dramatic, tragic, and uncomfortable act that is symbolized by this object. Symbols like are important and we need symbols like this because they are tied to this traumatic experience or act which we visualize and remember.
Profile of woman's face 	**Profile of woman's face**	No distinct features, plain.	No distinct features on the representations of the woman's face is about being universal and able to represent any race. Therefore, it could symbolize all women.
		Hair is in a bun, a common way to wear hair as a woman in Western society.	It is important to distinguish that it's not a man. It is important to recognize who this movement is about biologically, or who the law will directly address. Those who have female reproductive organs and can become pregnant.
		Historical reference or connection to the first wave of feminism and the type of hairstyle, clothing, and portraiture style from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Interviewees have referenced seeing this kind of visual in drawings, paintings, photographs, and jewelry of women from this period.	This symbol can therefore be a callback to the history of women and the struggle of/for feminism over the years.
	Her face is turned sideways	She is not looking at us, but we are looking at her.	Male gaze. Positioning of her face is reinforcing the idea that women are an object to be looked and desired (by men) and that their worth is determined by those who see and perceive them.

			She is feeling something where she cannot even look at those who are looking at her in the face. Maybe she is so upset or disgusted by the government and lawmakers, she must turn away.
	Her face is pointing to or looking in the right direction.	Facing right is associated with facing forward and looking in a forward direction. This can come from reading left to right in Western societies.	This can be connected to her as a universal female looking ahead, forward or into the future. This can symbolize that the movement is meant to symbolize change for a better future or that we can be hopeful for change to come. Forward motion can also symbolize progress.
	Profile of woman's face in **colour black**.	Darkness or shadows	Profile of woman's face in black as symbolizing that women are in the shadows and women should be in colour and their voices should be heard
Profile of woman's face in **colour white** 	**Colour white**	No colour	Invisible or colourless. This is connected to the feeling of the government overlooking women, not seeing them and not listening to them by going forward with this law about women's rights.
***The Handmaid's Tale* Reference** 	Female character in a red and white outfit	Reference to the Margaret Atwood novel *The Handmaid's Tale* which was made into a tv series for which the costume was adapted and created.	Reference to society of *The Handmaid's Tale* world. Symbolizes gender inequality, societal or class inequality, and no reproductive rights.
			Symbolizing a dystopian society where religion and beliefs are prioritized over human rights.
		Red and white can correspond to colours of the Polish flag	Connection to Poland
		Red and white can correspond to the colours used in the movement	Connection to the movement

Appendix 4 – Interviewee Sample

Interviewees are listed by number referring to the order that they were able to be interviewed in. Does not include pilot interview information.

Currently living in Poland: 5

Gender identity: 8 females, 3 males. Age: 23-35

Has shared visual media about the movement online: 10 out of 11

Has been to a Women's Strike protest in person: 6 out of 11

25 minutes or under transcript

26–44-minute transcript

45 minutes or over transcript

Interview Number	Interview Length	Age	Gender identity	Nationality	Current city of residence	Current country of residence	Work related title	Been to a Women's Strike event in person	Shared visual media about the movement online
1	45-minute transcript 7 min. chat before recording 45 min. interview 5 min. chat after recording (57 minutes total)	23	Female	Polish	Warszawa	Poland	Masters Student / Researcher	Yes	Yes
2	25-minute transcript 3 min. chat before recording 25 min. interview 4 min. chat after recording (32 minutes total)	33	Female	Swedish and Polish	Malmö	Sweden	Marketer	No	Yes
3	45-minute transcript 2 min. chat before recording 45 min. interview 3 min. chat after recording (50 minutes total)	26	Female	Swedish	Copenhagen	Denmark	Masters Student	No	Yes
4	39-minute transcript 5 min. chat before recording 39 min. interview 2 min. chat after recording (46 minutes total)	25	Male	Polish	Warszawa	Poland	Programmer (IOS Developer)	Yes	Yes

5	32-minute transcript 2 min. chat before recording 32 min. interview 2 min. chat after recording (36 minutes total)	24	Female	Polish	Poznań	Poland	SAP Intern (not a student)	Yes	Yes
6	30-minute transcript 5 min. chat before recording 30 min. interview 3 min. chat after recording (38 minutes total)	29	Female	Austrian	Hamburg	Germany	Business Lawyer	No	Yes
7	36-minute transcript 3 min. chat before recording 36 min. interview 4 min. chat after recording (43 minutes total)	23	Female	Polish	Helsinki	Finland	Masters Student	No	Yes
8	50-minute transcript 3 min. chat before recording 50 min. interview 2 min. chat after recording (55 minutes total)	24	Female	Polish	Warszawa	Poland	Post-secondary Student	Yes	Yes
9	21-minute transcript 4 min. chat before recording 21 min. interview 3 min. chat after recording (28 minutes total)	35	Male	Canadian	Ottawa	Canada	Social Worker	No	No
10	34-minute transcript 5 min. chat before recording 34 min. interview 4 min. chat after recording (43 minutes total)	26	Male	Canadian and Polish	Toronto	Canada	Account Manager at a Tech Startup	Yes	Yes
11	68-minute transcript 3 min. chat before recording 68 min. interview 3 min. chat after recording (74 minutes total)	27	Female	Polish	Warszawa	Poland	UX Researcher	Yes	Yes

Appendix 5 – Interview Request Form

Contacts in the researcher's network could share this form to potential recruits.

My name is Gabriella Gut, a Master of Science student at Lund University in Lund, Sweden. I am currently working toward my thesis for my Master's in Media and Communication Studies programme which will center on the Women's Strike in Poland. What I will focus on in the research is the visual media and symbols used online and in protests part of the Women's Strike and how people understand them, engage with them, or use them.

I will be doing interviews as part of the methodology for the research. I am looking for people that have seen, created and/or shared Women's Strike related visual media and images online between October 2020 and January 2021. They must also meet 1 of the following criteria:

- has Polish cultural background or citizenship
- currently residing in Poland
- has family residing in Poland

I am hoping to schedule and have Zoom interviews between March 5-19. The expected interview length is between 30-60 minutes. The interview questions will be in English because the programme is in English, but since I speak and understand Polish the interview can be flexible depending on the interviewee (they can respond to questions in Polish or English, for example). The interview can also be done with video off if that is what the interviewee prefers. Before the interview, the interviewee will sign a consent form which basically outlines that their identity will be anonymous and they will not be identifiable in the research.

If you know anyone that would fit this criteria and would be interested in speaking to me, please feel free to connect us on social media or via email (gabriella.gut.6355@student.lu.se).

Thank you!

Gabriella Gut
21 February 2021

Appendix 6 – Consent Form

Department of Communication and Media, Lund University
MKVN13 Thesis Course 2021

Interview Consent Form

This research centers on the All-Poland Women's Strike. It aims to explore the visual media used online and in demonstrations part of the All-Poland Women's Strike and how this form of communication is understood, engaged with, and used.

The interview will last between 30-60 minutes. You have the right to not answer any of the questions or to stop the interview at any time. It is requested to audio and/or video record the interview in order to analyze the interview transcript. This will be done only with your written or verbal consent. The information collected will be used in the thesis of the researcher, Gabriella Gut, within the Master of Science in Media and Communication Studies programme at Lund University.

It is guaranteed that you will not be identified by name in the findings resulting from this interview, and your participation in the study will remain confidential. If you agree to participate in the interview, please fill out this form manually or digitally and send it back to the researcher Gabriella Gut prior to your scheduled interview.

First and last name	Gender identity
Age	Nationality
Current city and country of residence	Work-related title
Signature	Today's date

Appendix 7 – Interview Guide

I. Interviewee and their connection to the Women's Strike movement

• Do you identify as being Polish?

  • Do you live in Poland? Do you have family in Poland?

• How did you first hear about the Women's Strike in Poland?

    • Where did you first see information about the movement?

• What do you see as some of the shared values within the movement?

    • What is it that is bringing people together in the movement?

    • Do you view the Women's Strike movement as a feminist movement?

• Would you say that *you* are involved in the Women's Strike movement?

• Do you feel connected to other individuals within the movement?

    • If so, *how* do you feel connected, or through what way?

II. Visual media and symbols

• When you think of the Women's Strike, what visual images or symbols come to mind?

So now I'll just go through the ones you listed and ask a few questions about those!

• When you see the _ *(fill in with something the interviewee has said),* what do you think of?

    • Have you seen this symbol used anywhere else?

    • Have you seen this symbol used in any other social movements?

        Repeat these 3 questions for all of the symbols the interviewee has said.

• Have you shared any visual media online related to the movement?

    • Where did you share it?

    • What made you want to share this visual media?

• Do you know anyone that has shared visual content about the Women's Strike movement online?

    • What is your relationship with them, or how do you know them?

• Do you know anyone that has created visual content about the movement?

    • What is your relationship with them, or how do you know them?

III. Mobilization, visual media, and connection

• Have you been to any of the Women's Strike demonstrations or protests in person?

    • If so, when, and where did the one(s) you went to take place?

- How did you hear or learn about the protest(s)?
- What made you want to attend the protest(s)?
- Did you attend by yourself or with someone you know?

• How did you know you were in the right place when you were looking for the protest(s) or for where to meet up for the demonstration(s)?

- What kinds of visual media and symbols did you see at the protest(s)?
- Where or on what did you see these symbols?

• What was the atmosphere like of being at a Women's Strike protest or demonstration?

- How did it feel to be a part of the protest(s) in person?
- How long did you stay there at the protest(s)?
- What made you leave?

• Do you know anyone else that has been to a Women's Strike protest or demonstration?

- How did you know they went?

• Do you personally know anyone that feels differently than you about the movement?

- What is something you would want to say to them if anything?

This is now the last question of the interview. I wanted to leave this space open for you to speak on anything you feel that we missed or if there is anything you would like to add.

• So, is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 8 – Interview Transcript

Interview 8 Transcript

Researcher: It should be working and yeah, we can start. So, the first question: do you identify as being Polish?

Interviewee: Do I, identify... Okay. First I will start, I'm not speak English very fluently. So maybe I will have like, you know, a few more time to just understand it or think about it or translate it in my mind. Uh, but well, to be honest, yes, but sometimes I am very ashamed of it. I mean, when I see what is happening here in my country, I just don't understand some of my government's, um, ideas and some of, uh, behavior or, of, political... yeah, people that are in power here. So yeah, I totally feel, as a Polish woman, but, um, yeah, but sometimes it's, it's really hard to admit it -laughs- because I, I just don't, you know... I don't, I really don't like what is happening here in my country. So yeah. I totally feel being Polish woman, but I don't, um, I don't like what is happening in my country right now?

Researcher: Yeah. Very honest answer. So thank you for that. Um, so you mentioned, of course you're living in Poland right now. Um, do you also have family and friends in Poland?

Interviewee: Uh, sorry, I didn't hear you.

Researcher: Do you also have family and friends in Poland?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I have. I mean, um, I have family in Poland and my friends are from here. So this is like, it's... you know, I have people that I love here. Um, but from the other side, I just, hmm... I don't like that we have to live in this country.

Researcher: Sure. Yeah. Um, onto the topic of this Women's Strike in Poland. How did you first hear about it?

Interviewee: How did I? Well, it was like few years ago because it started around 2-, 2016, I think. It was like the first women's strike here. Like very big strike. Mm. And, I don't even remember what was it exactly about. It was, I mean, I think it was like the beginning of this abortion subject there, but it wasn't... They we're starting talking about it in the government, and, and women start to, you know, realize that something is going wrong, that they, um, that's like some old guys, you know, are talking about, you know, you're right in the government and it's something, you know, that is not exactly, uh, the right thing. Uh, but then it was, you know, um, it's wasn't so, um... It was getting quiet. I mean, 2017, 2018. It was, it wasn't so loud here because nobody was touching the subject. And after this one, very big strike... People stop talking about it.

Researcher: Right.

Interviewee: Uh, but then, yeah, right now when we have COVID-19 pandemic start, uh, the pro-life people... uh, is that, do you know, getting the subject out and, you know, uh, and voting for, um, for, for this, um... this sick, law? Yeah, exactly. Yeah. For this sick law in the government and they thought that, yeah, it will be better if women won't have rights to get abortion... even in like very specific cases. Right. So, yeah. And we can't be independent in this.

Researcher: Right. Um-

Interviewee: -Now, it's kind of right now, I mean, 2020, it's like the biggest, you know, it's like strike was, we had strikes like every, every day. There was a period that, you know, that everyday thousands of thousands of people was going out in the, um, every Polish city. Um, yeah, and it was like around two months, that's every, you know, every day you have strike over the month. And every day you are going out and there are people striking on the streets and yeah. It was crazy.

Researcher: Yeah. I definitely want to talk more about those strikes as you've seen them, um, later, in the interview. Um, back to kind of like how you first heard about them. Did you first see information about the movement online or through like what platform or media?

Interviewee: You know what? I think it was through my friends. And also online. Yeah. I mean, we start to talk about it because it was very loud. I mean, everyone was talking about it. So first yeah, first I get information like from, from, from the conversation with my friends, but then also online. I start to read about it. There was, hmm. Yeah, there was information on Facebook and so on.

Researcher: Right. Yeah. Um, you already started talking amazingly about what this movement is about and kind of the history. Um, I have a question that's kind of more about what it is or what is it that's bringing people together, in your opinion or how you see it?

Interviewee: Well, the first thing is that it wasn't so easy to get people together when there's COVID. Yeah, yeah. This is like very big. Um, there was really something about it that, you know, people... it was really amazing that people, uh, get to the moment when they thought that this is so against law, and this is so unfair what Polish government is doing, that... they can even risk their lives. You know, and they help, to go out, and, uh, strike about it and talk about it. And that this is, you know, this is something that is even more important than, than your health. Yeah. That you have priority. And I also have like friends that, that told me that they *won't* go, you know, even if, uh, if it's, uh, against the, their, uh, the law, that... They don't want to risk it. Right? Right. But, uh, because from the other side, I also had a lot of friends that said, "okay, fuck it. I can be sick, but this is something that is more important for me because it's, this is my, um, yeah, this is my, um, law, and this is my, you know, humanity and, and somebody or someone is trying to, to get it away from me, like to, to just, yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: Like take the right away in a sense?

Interviewee: Yes exactly. Very important though.

Researcher: Yeah. Like, yeah, exactly. You said it. Um, I was wondering, do you view the Women's Strike in Poland as a feminist movement?

Interviewee: Uh, feminist movement... Well. Uh, that's very interesting question. I don't think it's, I don't think it's feminist really. I don't feel like very feminist person. Um, I saw very, I mean, a lot of men that were on the strike... Uh, and this is, this is something that it's, um... I mean, it's not only, it's not only law that is taken from women, but also from men. Right? And if you are thinking, men, that are, that, that is, you know, knows something about words about life, you can get to the point when you think, "okay, it's also... my right to, you know, to do this or not to do this".

Researcher: Okay.

Interviewee: So I don't think it's like very feminist movement. It's, it's more about women, of course. For women here, but, um, yeah, but it's not only women are fighting for their rights.

Researcher: Mhmm. Yeah, that was great. And are there any other like values that you would connect to the movement or why people are going to it? I guess.

Interviewee: To feel that they are not alone. You know, it's like, it's something that when you are in, when you are there, and you are striking and you are risking, you know, that police officer can take you, that you can go to the jail that you can, you know, they're risking your health, that you can get COVID and, you know, and so on. That, because there's, there's also, my God, like a fascist movement and it's like, you know, this, these people were even fighting with, with striking people. Yeah. And I also have situations when, you know, when somebody is going after you and shouting or trying to beat you even, uh, or dropping fireworks, you know, I was walking and there was a guy that was dropping fireworks into the people that was striking and you're like, "what the fuck is going on here in this country". Um, But you feel that there, when you see the, this kind of, you know, number of people from the street that are risking all of this, because every, this person has to get to the point when they realize that, "okay, I'm risking this, I'm risking this, I'm risking this". And even though I am going there and just fuck it. -laughs- And you see like this amount of people, um... It's, it's really amazing. You feel like, you know, you are part of something bigger. That is not only you, it's not only your friends, not only your family, not only people that are close with you, but the fucking, you know, bunch of stranger people that are thinking the same. -laughs- And they also can risk all of this just to have the, their, their, um, basic rights.

Researcher: Yeah. That was a really passionate answer too. So, I really appreciate that. Um, you're kind of alluding to it already, but do you feel connected to other individuals within the movement?

Interviewee: Yes. Yeah, for sure. Like really it's, it's interesting because for me it was, uh, an experience that, um, very unique experience that you see that you are connecting with like a very, very big amount of people. And it's really amazing.

Researcher: Kind of like a community and it's all at once.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. Yes, exactly. Yes. That you two just seem the same.

Researcher: Okay. Yeah. And it's also like when you come together in person, that's like a physical space, but do you feel connected as well online?

Interviewee: Online. Well, it's not that... It's not that intense when it's online. I mean because you don't see the, the number of people, right? Um, yeah, sometimes it's, it's, uh, you can see it. I mean, in the, when there was, uh, there was also, there was a lot of strikes, I mean, um, and strike online also that we have like online strike. Yeah. And uh, the people start to know, bugging pages of governments, for example, and a lot of this kind of things. And then, yeah, you can feel that it's, it's something big. That, you know, websites are not working or, um, I don't know. Um, yeah. That's, you know, that people are really... it also works online, but it's not, it don't, you don't see the scale of this. Yeah.

Researcher: And this is the last question of the first part. Um, but do you feel involved, or would you say that you are involved in the Women's Strike movement?

Interviewee: Yes.

Researcher: Yeah. And you, yeah. You talked about why and so that's good. So this is, um, I kind of want to shift our focus to this other area that I'm interested in for the research and it's the visual media and the symbols that are a part of this movement. Um, so it'll just be, yeah, a couple of questions about that one, but firstly, when you think of the Women's Strike, what are the visual images and symbols that come to mind for you?

Interviewee: Um, black umbrella that's first. Hmm. What else? Hmm. I mean, um, to be, to go to the, uh, cultural side, something that is for me related to this is, but, I don't know if you know this TV series called Handmaid... Uh, yeah.

Researcher: Handmaid's Tale? Yeah!

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah. I don't know the English name, but yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. Handmaid's Tale.

Interviewee: Yeah. So it's like, it's something that maybe it's, it's, you know, of course there's... It's not like in this TV series here for sure. Yeah. But, uh, but something related and you are like, "Oh my fucking God. So it can be like this." Right. So it's, it's not like very, because you have also in this TV series and normal world, that's like, that changed. Right. But the first you have like normal, not normal people that are living in the, um, in, in, I don't know, the, the city New York or somewhere. Right. And then something, you know, changed and people that are very conservative, just start to, you know, thinking... that everything have to be like God said, but they have nothing, it has nothing to do with a God. It's like something that is so, you know... Yeah. It's crazy how, how it can be real. Right. And I see like small similarities between this world from this TV series and something that is going on like right now. And I'm like, wow, -laughs- "what the fuck is going on"?

Researcher: Yeah. Twisted for sure.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Researcher: Are there any other visual media or symbols about this movement?

Interviewee: Uh, the, not a lighter, but you know, the... -draws lightning bolt shape in the air- yeah, that's a thing, piorun [lightning bolt in Polish]?

Researcher: I'm calling it a lightning bolt, but I think the thunder bolt is also acceptable. Mhmm okay so that one. Um, any other ones?

Interviewee: Oh, well, I'm sure you know, uh, 'Jebać PiS' -laughs-. So this is very, very good, um, motto of the strike.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay, cool. So that that's a lot, so we can go through those a little bit. Um, because for this like social sciences research, it's important for me to kind of break these symbols down and see why people are making connections and things like that. So, sorry if these questions sound very like basic or boring.

Interviewee: No, no, no! It's really, you have really good questions. Really? I can say something about it. So I feel comfortable with your questions don't worry -laughs-

Researcher: Okay! Um, so the first one kind of, I want to ask about the black umbrella. You mentioned that right away first, like this is it. Um, when you see a black umbrella outside of this context, why, what are you thinking of?

Interviewee: Well, I'm thinking about Women's Strike -laughs-

Researcher: Right? -laughs- it's hard now to disconnect them. Do you know why they picked it or what's going on with this?

Interviewee: Uh, why they pick it? I think it's, you know, for, uh, first it's symbol of, um, uh, oh my God... How to call it, um, grieving.

Researcher: Yeah, sure.

Interviewee: I mean, when somebody is dying, you are going, you know, and it's raining. Yeah, black umbrella over yourself. Um, the funeral, right? And it's something, you know, it's something very similar that you have, you know, they are trying to grieve your, your rights that you can only get your black umbrella, go to the funeral of your like basic, really it's basic rights. Yeah, to do, you know, to, to have the decision about your health and about your life. Because having like a child that is like, *very* sick and that can... I mean, you know, they are, it's something that is taking your life away. You, you don't have life, you don't have any choice then. You can't do anything else with your life. You just have to sit with this child for the rest of your life. And this is like, you know, when you think about it's more it's, it's, you know, uh... It's awful. So I think this is, uh, about the umbrella. Um, I mean, TV series, I told you about that. I see like, this is a symbol for me. I don't know how many people watch it, but I, I like watching a movie and I watch a lot of movies. So I, I was, I am trying to see some similarities. Yeah. Uh, and about this- Yeah?

Researcher: I still want to go back to this umbrella because it is important for a symbol, but I was wondering like, have you seen this black umbrella used anywhere else?

Interviewee: Uh, at the funerals? -laughs-

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Um, and, and maybe in any other social movements or?

Interviewee: Hmm, to be honest, I don't think so.

Researcher: Okay.

Interviewee: You know, maybe it is, but I don't, you know, I don't know about it.

Researcher: And then with this Handmaid's Tale, um, imagery, have you seen that one used in any other social movements or like political areas?

Interviewee: Mm, no, not really. I don't see any other movement that is like, so, hmm... I don't think. So this is something that is very, um, that this is getting to my mind when I think about fighting for, not only human rights, but more women's rights, like yeah.

Researcher: Is it only like in the context of Poland then ...in these?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. That is only in... I think it's more, um, you know that you, uh... I don't know how to call it, but when you are a woman mm... you just feel it. I mean, um, it's about just this whole... um, moments in our history and the, all of this, um, decision of you know, of the governments or, uh, or, uh, or also, unfortunately men's mostly, that they're getting as woman in the worst position. So it's not only about Polish women. I don't even identify myself in that case only as a Polish woman, but as a woman at all, that something is getting me, I mean, someone is taking my rights, just because I am a woman. But not that I am a human, but because I'm a woman, so, -laughs- it's...

Researcher: It's extreme.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay. Back to these symbols that are so important. With the 'piorun', the lightning bolt. Um, is there something you think of when you look at this image?

Interviewee: Yeah. It's about the anger. That it's, it's a, it's something that symbolizes, symbolizes anger as you know, I am angry when you have, uh, for example, for, for example, uh, emoji, you know, angry emoji can, you know, can get someone that is very, that you have a thunder on your -pointing to furrowed brow and cloud/thunder over her head- um, that's why you know, that somebody is angry. Um...

Researcher: Is it connected to this colour red at all too? Or is that separate for you?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah, it is connected.

Researcher: Um, with the lightning bolt, um, have you seen this symbol used anywhere else?

Interviewee: Um, uh, yes. I mean, many times. You have this symbol of, of many things. I mean, like uh thunder for example, anger even, um...

Researcher: Mhmm.

Interviewee: Yeah, but I, I don't know what else, what to say.

Researcher: That's okay. Yeah, no worries. You've said so much already. I'm just like, give me all of your information! -laughs- um, with the lightning bolts, did you see it in any other social movements?

Interviewee: I, I don't think so. I mean, maybe I did, but I don't think it's, um...

Researcher: Yeah, if it doesn't come to mind, then...

Interviewee: Nothing comes to my mind.

Researcher: Mhmm. And, of course "Jebać PiS", a lovely phrase, motto of the movement here, obviously it's connected um, to the party, the Polish party, um. Would, like, I guess in Poland, with the history would this type of motto like work in any other kind of context or movement, or is it specifically tied to this movement?

Interviewee: Um, well, it's interesting because in that case, and this is like two words that came... when people also start to be angry about other things. Though, it's not only uh, Women's Strike, but like a whole society that are angry about government, about some other things, start to shout it out loud and yeah. -laughs- There are songs about it and people are just, sorry. I didn't hear you?

Researcher: Uh, I didn't mean to cut you off. Yeah. Um, if you could translate like "Jebać" in English, how would you phrase this?

Interviewee: Uh, “fuck”.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay. I love that I'm gonna write all this, like “fuck” and everything in my thesis as well -laughs- It's not just you, by the way. There's been other people of course.

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah. I can imagine it's -laughs- very popular.

Researcher: So I was wondering, have you shared any visual media online that is related to this movement?

Interviewee: Sorry. I don't understand the question.

Researcher: Like, with all of these symbols and things, maybe you've seen the symbols on online posts, for example, or in articles, or like, I don't know. Sometimes I saw the profile picture with the lightning bolt. Did you do any of this or share any of this media?

Interviewee: Uh, yeah, I have it on my, uh, on my profile, on my Facebook. I posted it. Yeah, because it was like, when it started, people started to post it a lot in your profile picture, for example, as you said. Uh, with, uh, with this thunder and, um, yeah, I also have it -laughs-.

Researcher: Right.

Interviewee: Just to show this sort of solidarity.

Researcher: Okay. That, that's what I was going to ask you, like what made you share it? But it was about kind of the awareness and the solidarity of the movement.

Interviewee: Yes, yes.

Researcher: Um, okay, perfect. And then do you know anyone else that has shared visual content like this or other connected to the movement online?

Interviewee: Uh, yes. Uh, a lot of my friends, most of my friends.

Researcher: And is it on Facebook or is it other places?

Interviewee: Um, mostly on Facebook, um, on Instagram... um, yeah, mostly on this too.

Researcher: Mhmm. Yep. Um, do you know anyone that has created visual content about the movement?

Interviewee: Uh, well I know that friend of my friend, uh, like he wrote a website that you can, uh, send emails. Yeah, he's a kind of hacker. And, uh, and he write the website that you can send that, um, gen- generate uh...

Researcher: Generator? Yeah. Something like this?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's like... This website is doing, like lots of emails... to the whole government, um, like people from the government and you just have to, you know, get to this website and click "Okay" and it's sending, you know, uh, thousands of emails. And it start to, it was very popular for here, this website, and people were, you know, sending like thousands of thousands of thousands of millions of millions... so this kind of ways. So, it was so spamming. Um, yeah, and they didn't, you know, of course we're replying. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, exactly, you can't even do anything.

Interviewee: Exactly, it was very like stupid emails, kind of, um, "Dear Mr. President," um, just "think about what you are doing" and, you know, and this kind of stuff.

Researcher: Right. Kind of for that visibility as well, like look at all of these females...

Interviewee: Yeah, look how many people are writing to you and just “fuck off” -laughs-.

Researcher: Right. Amazing. Okay. I'm really glad you mentioned that one because it's. It's like specific to someone, you know, and I wouldn't have heard about it probably otherwise. So that's very cool. Um, this is the last kind of, part of the interview now, and I kind of want to talk about questions related to the mobilization, physical protests and also visual media within that. So I wonder, have you been to any of the protests in person?

Interviewee: Yes.

Researcher: And if so, like when and where did they take place or was it just one?

Interviewee: Uh, no, it was a few. Um, it was in the Warsaw, um, yeah, I was in Warsaw.

Researcher: Do you know like how many went to, I guess?

Interviewee: No, I guess I don't remember. I think it was around 7 to 10, I think... But I don't really, I don't really remember the exact number. Sometimes it was like, you know, walking a whole day and sometimes it was like more one hour. Yeah. But it was intense. I think it could be around 10.

Researcher: And do you know, like when the first one you went to was, or at least what year this was?

Interviewee: In September, I think...

Researcher: Yeah, that makes sense, in 2020?,

Interviewee: Yes, 2020. Sorry, I was at the protest in 2016. It was like my first protest then. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. That's so cool. You're like a, a veteran of going to these protests. Like you've been to the 'original' one, so very interesting. So how did you hear or learn about the protests in general?

Interviewee: Um, I think I there'll be honest. I don't remember because it was in... like, a few years ago when it started, I think it was from, or from my mom or from TV. When I, you know, when I started to hear about problems that, that are, um, that are starting. Yeah.

Researcher: Would it have been online at all? Like come, come to this protest, like time and place or. Like, how does that look like?

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, uh, I don't remember very well that period of time, this 2016, when it's, you know, 16 or 15, I don't even remember the exact year, but I know that it was like few years ago. But right now, uh, yeah, there are a lot of, uh, information on Facebook. Yeah. And there was a period of time when, you know, you had every day, um, information that, okay, right now we are going there. And, but it wasn't organized. This is the best thing that people are, where... I'm going, you know, wherever somebody has told you. Yeah, because it had to be spontaneous, uh, because uh, Polish governments, uh, was trying to organize everything and it had to be like without any organization, because, um, because... uh, it would be more dangerous because Polish police are very aggressive and they'd have to be, you know, like destruction. We have to be destructive, you know? Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. That absolutely makes sense. Um, that it would have to be this, like you just show up and don't yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. Somebody is telling you, "okay, uh, be in half hour there and there". And you know that this, uh, thousands of people are going there and then somebody is telling you, okay, now you are going there. And these thousands of people that are going there.

Researcher: That's crazy. It must have been so interesting to actually be there in person. And you already kind of talked about it. Um, what is the atmosphere of being at a protest like? And maybe there's differences because of the ones that you went to. But I don't know if you can talk about a generally at all?

Interviewee: Uh, I can, uh, it's very funny because, uh, I think it's, they were very peaceful.

Researcher: Okay.

Interviewee: I mean, um, I didn't feel, um, any danger from people that were there. I see that they are very, um, they, that they don't want to fight. They are not aggressive. Um, and, um, yeah, and it was really cool because I didn't see any danger from these people, even that they were strangers for me, right? Um, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, absolutely. Um, and when you go to these protests, do you go alone or do you go with someone else?

Interviewee: No, I went to mostly with my friends.

Researcher: And I guess you all, you already talked about it, um, that you're kind of getting this like notification or message, like come here, uh, within half an hour or something like this, but, um, other than the crowds, how do you know you're in the right place when you're looking for this protest? Is there any other... way that you know it's the right demonstration?

Interviewee: Um, no, not really. I mean, yeah. I mean only that's the strikes, the protests were in the specific places. Like, you know, near to government, near to the building, I mean, near to President's Palace. Right. So, um, okay, but you... Everyday, you didn't know where exactly there will be striking. You, we will be striking. So it was, but it was like a few places that it's the most possible that... it will be there -laughs-.

Researcher: Yeah. That makes sense. Not like some random alley or-

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly, exactly. But also no, but also one strike, uh, or not even one was, uh, totally random. I mean, yeah. One strike was, uh, there was an information that there's no plan for striking. You have to strike, well, wherever you are. I mean that you are, you know, walking on the street and somebody is telling you, "Okay. Um, at 3:00 PM, just walk on the street without any reason". And so, you know, like thousands of people are walking, and there are some traffic, like a lot of traffic because people in the whole country are walking on the street and no car can, you know, pass by.

Researcher: It's disruptive to that in a, in a progressive way. I would say at least.

Interviewee: Exactly.

Researcher: Um, my next question is kind of like what kinds of visual media and symbols do you see at these protests or demonstrations?

Interviewee: Well, the, the, the one that I told you about, um, and also I really liked the, the, um, uh, the some of, uh, of mottoes of the strike. I mean, the, something that you're writing on the sign? Sign, exactly. They were very creative, some. They were very creative that you are, you know, people were very creative in thinking about, um, this, um, not mottos, but about this, you know, the, the text that, that they were writing, that they were protesting with. Um, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, exactly. I was going to ask, like, was it on signs on, you said signs, um, when you saw maybe like those Handmaid's Tale, like, is it people wearing costumes? -laughs- Or like, how does that work?

Interviewee: Oh, yeah, I also saw some people that were wearing costumes. Yeah.

Researcher: Crazy. It's so cool. But-

Interviewee: Yeah, like it's amazing because, uh, there was many situation when people were dancing. I think it was because of COVID, so people don't have any parties or anything. And then this protest, you know, we have like... Um, really, I think in the, every protest that I was in, there was a, you know, like dancing place -laughs- or dancing bus, that were you know, like at the party that is driving, just to get people, you know... not to be so, um, worried. So, um...

Researcher: Change the emotion and mood?

Interviewee: Exactly! Into something that is, uh, that is good, right?

Researcher: Yeah. So more, more positive kind of.

Interviewee: Exactly. Exactly. And I saw like a lot of people dancing at this protest. I was dancing a lot -laughs-.

Researcher: I would too. Yeah. Yeah. That's great. Um, we're coming to the end, just so you know. Um, do you know anyone else that has been to a protest? Oh, you already answered this. Cause you said you were going with friends and stuff.

Interviewee: With friends. Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. Um, for the people that you weren't with, if there were other friends that went or people you know, like, how did you know that they went?

Interviewee: Uh, because... Uh, you mean friends of my friends, for example, or my colleagues? Um, I was, for example, in some conversation, uh, with like people that are not my friends, but that I know. Yeah. And, uh, And it was like a group of people on Facebook, like very big conversation, uh, with many, many people that just want to go and protest and they were, you know, asking, "Hey, if anyone are going today?".

Researcher: Okay.

Interviewee: Um, yeah. So it would be this.

Researcher: Yeah, that's perfect. Um, I guess, do you know if they would share like images themselves of these protests that they went to like photography from the protests? Yeah? And you would see it online, I guess?

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, um, a lot of my friends was sharing pictures for Instagram, for example, or on Facebook.

Researcher: Right.

Interviewee: And I also, uh, am studying in the film school. So I know lots of people that are... Um, taking pictures, just this, like this is like more artistic pictures and that they are also involved, but also they want to, you know, cut some piece of reality and...

Researcher: Wow. That's very interesting. Yeah. Um, because to document it is...

Interviewee: Yes, or they're... Yeah. And they had like really, they take very interesting, nice pictures that are, you know, coming to your heart.

Researcher: Yeah, absolutely. Um, I'm wondering too, like, do you personally know anyone that feels differently than you about this movement?

Interviewee: Hmm. Yeah. I know people that are against it. And people that don't understand it.

Researcher: Yeah. What is something that you would want to say to them, if anything? Or why is this movement important?

Interviewee: Well, to be honest, I don't think I... hmm. What I want to say to them. I don't think I want to say to them anything. I mean, the, the, the people I know that are against it are *so much* against it, that nothing is coming to them. I was trying to write with my friend about it, but it didn't have like, any sense. She was like, completely... you know, talking with somebody that are thinking that you are killing children. Yeah. It's like, it's like, it's so different from what I'm thinking that I don't have any place to... communicate, communicate with this person, you know? So I don't see reason to, to even start conversation. I just, you know, it's like so important for me that I'm, um, that I'm saying this person that's yeah, that I don't want to continue this relation most of the time.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. See, you've tried, it sounds like, so. Um, that's actually, that's the end of this interview, but this last question is just kind of a chance... if you wanted to add anything that you think we missed or that you wanted to say more about. Um, so yeah, I will leave this stage for you if you want to add anything.

Interviewee: -laughs- No, I think, uh, I mean, you you've given me so good questions that I don't think I have like much more to say about it. It's like basically what I, what I told you.

Researcher: You definitely gave me so many good answers! It was such a passionate interview. And so in-depth, so I will stop the recording.

Appendix 9 – Coding Excerpt

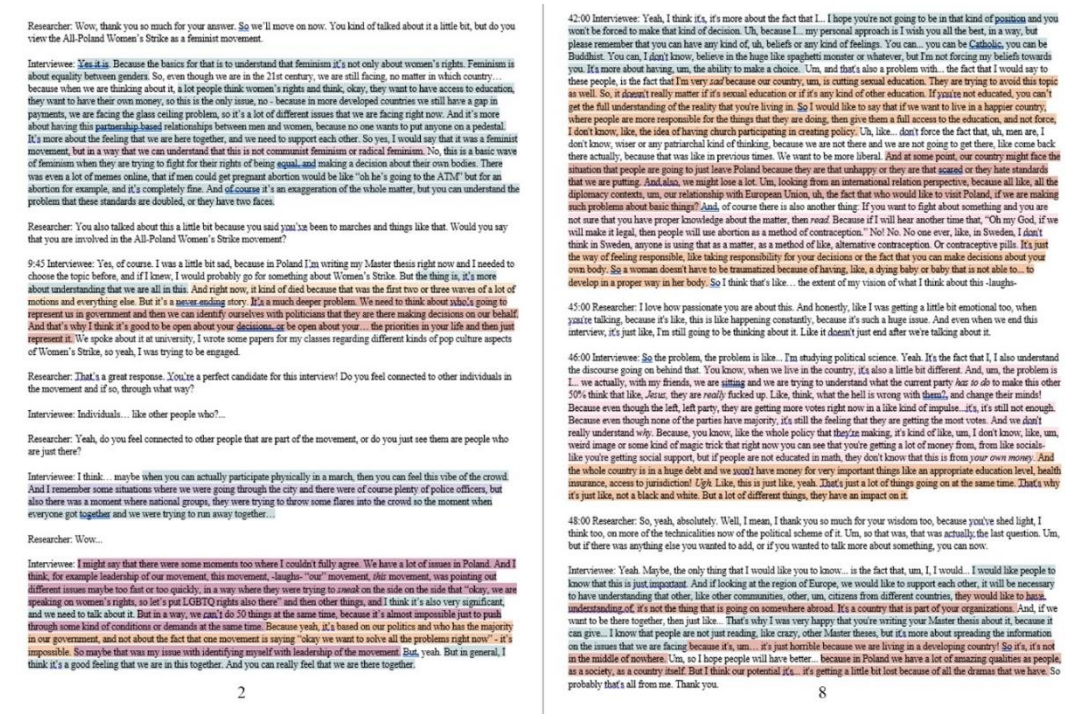
Interview Coding
All/for 11 Interviews: **Descriptive (open) codes: 311 individual codes** (202 codes [between pg1-11] + 108 visual related codes)
Interview 1: Descriptive codes: 72 (non-visual related codes) + 30 (visual related codes) = 102 total codes

All Interviews	
Descriptive Codes	**Correlates to this interview #**
Currently living in Poland	1, 4, 5, 8, 11
Has always lived in Poland	11
Born and raised in Poland	1, 4, 5, 7, 11
Currently living outside of Poland	2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10
Has family living in Poland	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Nationality is Polish	1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11
identifies as being Polish	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Dual citizen and identifies as both	3, 9, 10
Feels like even though they are Polish they identify more with another nationality	2, 3, 6, 9
Not always thinking about their nationality, only when someone asks them about it	5
Hard to completely identify with being Polish because of the current political situation or Hard to connect to Polish identity, citizenship, Polish government, living in Poland because of the political situation	1, 8
Wants to feel patriotic and proud of their country but can't because they are ashamed of what's happening with the law	3, 8, 10
Sense of Polish government being corrupt.	1, 6, 7
Feeling that movement is response to Polish government's disproportionate power or misuse of power	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Feeling that there is a kind of hatred among people for the current ruling government	4, 7, 9, 10, 11

People who stayed home during the protest still participated in the movement by putting visual media like banners and posters on their balconies, or pictures of the lightning bolts on their windows.	1, 5, 7, 11
Interviewee was able to identify the strikes by visiting Warsaw a month after the strike and seeing things written like "Strajk Kobiet".	3
Interviewee was able to identify the in-person protest by the visual media like banners, signs, stickers and pins.	1, 4, 8, 10, 11
Visual content that interviewee has seen created in person includes: masks, preparing banners, making signs, drawing lightning bolts, costumes	1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11
Personally knows someone that has created visual content about the movement	1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11
Has a friend that has created visual content about the movement	1, 8, 10
Interviewee has a friend that created a website to spam the Polish government's emails through user participation	8
Interviewee has created visual content for the movement 3 (Instagram story with personal text), 10 (signs), 11 (photos, signs, poems, writing)	3, 10, 11
Interviewee has not created visual content for the movement	1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9
Interviewee has shared visual content for the movement online	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11
Interviewee feels connected to people who have shared visual content about the movement online	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11
Interviewee is following photographers on social media (Facebook, 3) (Instagram, 3, 7) who are taking photos of the protests in person	3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11
Interviewee has seen visual symbols like signs with mottos in photographs online of the protests	3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
Interviewee knows people who changed their Facebook profile picture to add this lightning bolt symbol	2, 7, 8
Types of visual media interviewee was sharing on their Instagram were beautiful and simple in style	7
Interviewee is usually hesitant to share a lot on their own Instagram stories. More of a private social media person.	1, 7
Interviewee shared information about the movement on their Facebook	3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11
Interviewee shared information about the movement on their Instagram	2, 7, 10, 11
Interviewee shared the movement logo (lightning bolt) on their Facebook profile picture	1, 7, 8
Interviewee shared the movement logo (lightning bolt) on their Instagram	1, 4, 6
Interviewee shared the visual media related to the movement on their Instagram stories	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11
Interviewee shared photos from the strike on their Instagram.	1, 5, 6, 10, 11
Interviewee reflects that they mostly shared content related to the movement on their Instagram	1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11

Appendix 10 – Coded Interview Transcript Excerpt

Interview 1



Researcher: Wow, thank you so much for your answer. So we'll move on now. You kind of talked about it a little bit, but do you view the All-Poland Women's Strike as a feminist movement.

Interviewee: Yes it is. Because the basics for that is to understand that feminism it's not only about women's rights. Feminism is about equality between genders. So, even though we are in the 21st century, we are still facing, no matter in which country… because when we are thinking about it, a lot people think women's rights and think, okay, they want to have access to education, they want to have their own money, so this is the only issue, no - because in more developed countries we still have a gap in payments, we are facing the glass ceiling problem, so it's a lot of different issues that we are facing right now. And it's more about having this partnership-based relationships between men and women, because no one wants to put anyone on a pedestal. It's more about the feeling that we are here together, and we need to support each other. So yes, I would say that it was a feminist movement, but in a way that we can understand that this is not communist feminism or radical feminism. No, this is a basic wave of feminism when they are trying to fight for their rights of being equal, and making a decision about their own bodies. There was even a lot of memes online, that if men could get pregnant abortion would be like "oh he's going to the ATM" but for an abortion for example, and it's completely fine. And of course it's an exaggeration of the whole matter, but you can understand the problem that these standards are doubled, or they have two faces.

Researcher: You also talked about this a little bit because you said you've been to marches and things like that. Would you say that you are involved in the All-Poland Women's Strike movement?

9:45 Interviewee: Yes, of course. I was a little bit sad, because in Poland I'm writing my Master thesis right now and I needed to choose the topic before, and if I knew, I would probably go for something about Women's Strike. But the thing is, it's more about understanding that we are all in this. And right now, it kind of died because that was the first two or three waves of a lot of motions and everything else. But it's a never-ending story. It's a much deeper problem. We need to think about who's going to represent us in government and then we can identify ourselves with politicians that they are there making decisions on our behalf. And that's why I think it's good to be open about your decisions, or be open about your… the priorities in your life and then just represent it. We spoke about it at university, I wrote some papers for my classes regarding different kinds of pop culture aspects of Women's Strike, so yeah, I was trying to be engaged.

Researcher: That's a great response. You're a perfect candidate for this interview! Do you feel connected to other individuals in the movement and if so, through what way?

Interviewee: Individuals… like other people who?...

Researcher: Yeah, do you feel connected to other people that are part of the movement, or do you just see them are people who are just there?

Interviewee: I think… maybe when you can actually participate physically in a march, then you can feel this vibe of the crowd. And I remember some situations where we were going through the city and there were of course plenty of police officers, but also there was a moment where national groups, they were trying to throw some flares into the crowd so the moment when everyone got together and we were trying to run away together…

Researcher: Wow...

Interviewee: I might say that there were some moments too where I couldn't fully agree. We have a lot of issues in Poland. And I think, for example leadership of our movement, this movement, -laughs- "our" movement, *this* movement, was pointing out different issues maybe too fast or too quickly, in a way where they were trying to *sneak* on the side on the side that "okay, we are speaking on women's rights, so let's put LGBTQ rights also there" and then other things, and I think it's also very significant, and we need to talk about it. But in a way, we can't do 50 things at the same time, because it's almost impossible just to push through some kind of conditions or demands at the same time. Because yeah, it's based on our politics and who has the majority in our government, and not about the fact that one movement is saying "okay we want to solve all the problems right now" – it's impossible. So maybe that was my issue with identifying myself with leadership of the movement. But, yeah. But in general, I think it's a good feeling that we are in this together. And you can really feel that we are there together.

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42:00 Interviewee: Yeah, I think it's, it's more about the fact that I... I hope you're not going to be in that kind of position and you won't be forced to make that kind of decision. Uh, because I... my personal approach is I wish you all the best, in a way, but please remember that you can have any kind of, uh, beliefs or any kind of feelings. You can... you can be Catholic, you can be Buddhist. You can, I don't know, believe in the huge like spaghetti monster or whatever, but I'm not forcing my beliefs towards you. It's more about having, um, the ability to make a choice. Um, and that's also a problem with... the fact that I would say to these people, is the fact that I'm very *sad* because our country, um, is cutting sexual education. They are trying to avoid this topic as well. So, it doesn't really matter if it's sexual education or if it's any kind of other education. If you're not educated, you can't get the full understanding of the reality that you're living in. So I would like to say that if we want to live in a happier country, where people are more responsible for the things that they are doing, then give them a full access to the education, and not force, I don't know, like, the idea of having church participating in creating policy. Uh, like... don't force the fact that, uh, men are, I don't know, wiser or any patriarchal kind of thinking, because we are not there and we are not going to get there, like come back there actually, because that was like in previous times. We want to be more liberal. And at some point, our country might face the situation that people are going to just leave Poland because they are that unhappy or they are that scared or they hate standards that we are putting. And also, we might lose a lot. Um, looking from an international relation perspective, because all like, all the diplomacy contexts, um, our relationship with European Union, uh, the fact that who would like to visit Poland, if we are making such problems about basic things? And, of course there is also another thing: If you want to fight about something and you are not sure that you have proper knowledge about the matter, then *read*. Because if I will hear another time that, "Oh my God, if we will make it legal, then people will use abortion as a method of contraception." No! No. No one ever, like, in Sweden, I don't think in Sweden, anyone is using that as a matter, as a method of like, alternative contraception. Or contraceptive pills. It's just the way of feeling responsible, like taking responsibility for your decisions or the fact that you can make decisions about your own body. So a woman doesn't have to be traumatized because of having, like, a dying baby or baby that is not able to… to develop in a proper way in her body. So I think that's like… the extent of my vision of what I think about this -laughs-

45:00 Researcher: I love how passionate you are about this. And honestly, like I was getting a little bit emotional too, when you're talking, because it's like, this is like happening constantly, because it's such a huge issue. And even when we end this interview, it's just like, I'm still going to be thinking about it. Like it doesn't just end after we're talking about it.

46:00 Interviewee: So the problem, the problem is like... I'm studying political science. Yeah. It's the fact that I, I also understand the discourse going on behind that. You know, when we live in the country, it's also a little bit different. And, um, the problem is I... we actually, with my friends, we are sitting and we are trying to understand what the current party *has to do* to make this other 50% think that like, *Jesus*, they are *really* fucked up. Like, think, what the hell is wrong with them?, and change their minds! Because even though the left, left party, they are getting more votes right now in a like kind of impulse…it's, it's still not enough. Because even though none of the parties have majority, it's still the feeling that they are getting the most votes. And we don't really understand *why*. Because, you know, like the whole policy that they're making, it's kind of like, um, I don't know, like, um, weird image or some kind of magic trick that right now you can see that you're getting a lot of money from, from like socials- like you're getting social support, but if people are not educated in math, they don't know that this is from *your own money*. And the whole country is in a huge debt and we won't have money for very important things like an appropriate education level, health insurance, access to jurisdiction! *Ugh*. Like, this is just like, yeah. That's just a lot of things going on at the same time. That's why it's just like, not a black and white. But a lot of different things, they have an impact on it.

48:00 Researcher: So, yeah, absolutely. Well, I mean, I thank you so much for your wisdom too, because you've shed light, I think too, on more of the technicalities now of the political scheme of it. Um, so that was, that was actually the last question. Um, but if there was anything else you wanted to add, or if you wanted to talk more about something, you can now.

Interviewee: Yeah. Maybe, the only thing that I would like you to know… is the fact that, um, I, I would… I would like people to know that this is just important. And if looking at the region of Europe, we would like to support each other, it will be necessary to have understanding that other, like other communities, other, um, citizens from different countries, they would like to have, understanding of, it's not the thing that is going on somewhere abroad. It's a country that is part of your organizations. And, if we want to be there together, then just like… That's why I was very happy that you're writing your Master thesis about it, because it can give… I know that people are not just reading, like crazy, other Master theses, but it's more about spreading the information on the issues that we are facing because it's, um… it's just horrible because we are living in a developing country! So it's, it's not in the middle of nowhere. Um, so I hope people will have better… because in Poland we have a lot of amazing qualities as people, as a society, as a country itself. But I think our potential it's… it's getting a little bit lost because of all the dramas that we have. So probably that's all from me. Thank you.

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Appendix 11 – Category Excerpt