International Journal of Communication 10(2016), 235–253 1932–8036/20160005

Participants on the Margins: #BlackLivesMatter and the Role That Shared Artifacts of Engagement Played Among Minoritized Political Newcomers on Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter

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Using ethnographic methods, this article explores social media as a contested public space for diverse young people at the margins of politics, focusing on social media use in a school walkout held in solidarity with Ferguson protesters. The article offers a conceptualization of what are termed *artifacts of engagement*—the photos, messages, and other materials signaling political involvement that young students of color shared with peers through Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter. Shared artifacts of engagement are described as key to how individuals personalize expressions of a movement's goals in what Bennett and Segerberg termed connective action. But the sharing of such artifacts in online spaces is not unproblematic, as this article attests.

Keywords: #BlackLivesMatter, Ferguson, student protests, social media, counterpublics, ethnographic methods, artifacts of engagement, political newcomers, connective action, social movements, digital material

Introduction

"Whites torch cop cars and destroy property after baseball games: rowdy. Blacks torch cop cars and destroy property after cops get away with murder: savages."

—Observation attributed to a comment in worldstarhiphop.com and circulated via blogs, tweets, Tumblrs, and Instagram, December 5, 2014.

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Date submitted: 2015–06–13

[1] The author wishes to acknowledge Adrienne Russell, Thomas Poell, and the anonymous reviewers who offered suggestions for this article, and thanks the University of Denver's Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning for supporting this research.

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In late November and early December 2014, thousands of people in more than 170 U.S. cities participated in demonstrations protesting the grand jury decision not to indict officer Darren Wilson in the shooting death of unarmed teenager Michael Brown (Almasy & Yan, 2014). A week after the decision in Ferguson, Missouri, protests widened after the a New York grand jury declined to indict a New York Police Department officer in the case of Eric Garner, an unarmed man who resisted arrest and then died when placed in an apparent chokehold. By early December, such urgent and pandemic responses prompted activists and journalists to speculate that they were witnessing the beginning of a new social movement that called attention to racial bias in law enforcement and its connection to the wider social and economic systems that reinforce disadvantage among U.S. young people of color, and came to be associated with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter (Blake 2014; Roth 2014; see also Goffman, 2014; Gordon, forthcoming).

By late November, thousands of students aged 11 to 18 had staged walkouts from their schools in solidarity with the Ferguson and Garner protesters. Some held their hands in the air while others hoisted signs reading, "Black Lives Matter" and "Hands up, Don't shoot"; some participated in "die-ins" in honor of Brown and Garner (Klein, 2014; Schworm, 2014). Many more expressed solidarity in online venues, sharing photos and expressions of indignation via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr (see, e.g., http://millennialau.tumblr.com).

This article presents a case study of 22 high-school-age students of color who were observed over the course of a year as they considered participating in a walkout, observed others in their peer networks making similar decisions about participating, and then interpreted that participation after the fact. It explores the role that the social media platforms Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter played in this decision-making and in reflections about participation. Its aim is to contribute to understandings of how social movements develop, following Palczewski (2011) and Papacharissi (2014), who have called for paying attention to not just state-focused political activism but also culturally driven discursive politics and the strong emotions they generate. Specifically, the article explores how scholars might understand the processes that hail young newcomers to political action into online and off-line protest activities, and how these youths make their voices heard as participants in these activities.

The article discusses the role of online *artifacts of political engagement*, which I define as the photos, memes, quoted sayings, and original or curated commentary that evince young people's emotional investment and participation in unfolding events. It argues that these were important in the formation of counterpublics that newcomers could come to identify with as they decided whether to add their voices to dissent within contested public spaces. Equally important were the constraints of differing social media spaces, which shaped how, in what venues, and when young people participated (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; van Dijck, 2013).

This case thus draws upon ethnographic fieldwork to provide new insights into the relationships between what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have termed *connective action* and its relationship to the formation of counterpublics (Fraser, 1992). Results suggest that when newcomers from minoritized communities used social network sites to display artifacts of their own engagement in political activities, one of two things occurred: Some newcomers found in those artifacts the motivation to participate themselves, whereas others, having seen their friends criticized for participating, decided *not* to

participate. This outcome challenges the claim that online activism can be dismissed as "cheap talk" (Farrell & Rabin, 1996) or "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2009 of little consequence, as it demonstrates that digital activism plays an important role in providing encouragement for those at the political margins to see themselves as at least potentially part of an unfolding movement. It also underscores the weight of criticism that newcomers encounter on various social media sites, which they must overcome to participate in the movement.

To develop this argument, I first review research into the relationships between online and off-line political engagement, the emergence of a Ferguson counterpublic, and ideas about the relationship between counterpublics and social media. I then relate these discussions to research on young people of color and the contextual factors that shape their involvement in publics and in political action, so as to consider how the particular young people in this study negotiated the contested spaces they encountered both on- and off-line in relation to their own high school's walkout, and how their own participation in sharing artifacts of engagement played a role in bringing a counterpublic into being.

The Relationship Between Online and Off-line Political Engagement

Scholars have roundly contested the technological determinism implied in phrases like "Facebook revolution" or "Twitter revolution," but most agree that social media platforms have been widely appropriated and turned into a medium for mobilization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013; Castells, 2012; Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004; Howard & Parks, 2012; Juris, 2012). A particularly influential study by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) explored the emergence of connective action, or the ways that networked communication allows individuals to personalize expressions of a movement's goals with little attention to the organized leadership of social movement organizations. People join in movement activities because they are emotionally involved in issues and desire to experience togetherness in addressing them, as Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliviera (2012) and others have noted (see also Ardevol, Roig, Cornelio, Pages, & Alsina, 2010; Postill, 2013; Russell, 2013). Yet as Gerbaudo (2012) has observed, "far from inaugurating a situation of absolute leaderlessness, social media have in fact facilitated the rise of complex or liquid soft forms of leadership, which exploit the interactive and participatory character of the new communication technologies" (p. 13). Key to the emergence of a movement, then, is the people who can give expression to emotions that others are also feeling (Agarwal, Lim, & Wigand, 2011). Sometimes individuals who are able to provide such emotional responses to unfolding events are elevated to "soft leadership" in larger groups, but sometimes they remain relatively unknown outside of their immediate social circles. This article argues that even communication among circles of much smaller influence can make a difference in the development of a movement and its articulation as a counterpublic.

The Emergence of a Ferguson Counterpublic

Whereas Habermas (1989) described a singular public sphere in which people can share information and opinions to form a public, Fraser (1992) argued that there are actually multiple publics that influence political action. In fact, she noted, "subaltern" or marginalized groups participate in creating *counterpublics* in response to the exclusionary politics of dominant publics. People do not "join" counterpublics so much as they are hailed into them by finding their own viewpoints and emotions

validated by a collection of others and in relation to texts and their circulation (Warner, 2002). In becoming able to recount their own experiences and feel that those experiences are heard and matter in relation to public policy, they experience themselves as actors within those counterpublics (Couldry, 2010). Often, these experiences of voice occur primarily, or only, within diasporic public spheres, thus limiting the subaltern's ability to speak and be heard in transnational flows of mediation (Chouliaraki, 2013; Spivak, 1988).

Although conversations about Ferguson seemed to erupt spontaneously on social media in the days and months following the shooting death of Michael Brown, what was articulated aligned with the African American community's long-standing rage about injustices in law enforcement. People's expressions of dismay and frustration over the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, and of anger over the ways they perceived the justice system to have failed their communities, were recognizable, personalizable texts connected only loosely with existing and nascent social organizations seeking to bring about political change. Similarly, the students in this study found that their own conflicted feelings about law enforcement were echoed and reinforced by what they were seeing and hearing in the various social media spaces where they interacted with peers, as will be discussed.

Counterpublics and Social Media

Media coverage of unfolding events occurs within neoliberal international, national, and local media outlets, and the political economy of these industries produces a narrow representation of nondominant groups (Gray, 2009b). Ultimately, movements cannot maintain control over how those identities will be articulated in discourse (Butler, 1993; Warner, 1999). Those who are not members of dominant social groups therefore rely on the strategic deployment of identity and tend to communicate within networks of familiarity both online and off (Gray, 2009a). Rather than exploring the connection between counterpublics and mainstream media representation, therefore, this article looks at how students interacted with each other and with others across various social media platforms.

Social media platforms such as Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram share several characteristics. They are commercial; they are easily accessed through smartphones, laptops, or tablets; and they allow for instantaneous and real-time postings such as quick reports, shared photos, or short replies. But they are also distinct. Facebook serves as a "social lubricant" that allows people to broadcast positive and negative life events and seek further support or information (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). Twitter encourages playful performances and improvisation within its 140-character limit (Papacharissi, 2012). Snapchat allows users to communicate with a select group of recipients, control how long those recipients will have access to the message sent by the user, and learn instantly whether or not the recipient has opened the "snap." It is therefore less public than other social network sites but more likely to garner an immediate response, because of its time limit (boyd, 2014).

Previous research has found that social media such as Facebook and Twitter enhance or enlarge counterpublics (Eckert & Chadha, 2013; Leung & Lee, 2014; Milioni, 2009). But Dahlgren (2005) broadened the definition of a counterpublic beyond single sites, suggesting that a public or counterpublic may be understood as "a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of

information, ideas, debates, ideally in an unfettered manner," where political will may be constituted (p. 148). This article embraces that definition, along with Tierney's (2013) observation that since governments have caught on and harnessed commercial sites for surveillance, counterpublics have now gone mobile. Soriano (2014) further pointed out that the process of connectivity facilitated by social media sites opens avenues to the identification, belonging, and support that energize collective resistance to oppressive power, even as such groups are more cognizant than ever of the consequences of surveillance.

Online Counterpublics, Race, and Youth Activism

Squires (2002) drew a key distinction between groups engaged in "idle talk" and groups that have the potential to act as counterpublics, noting that what she termed a Black public sphere must offer space for critique of the dominant order while also enabling participants to engage in action that can challenge and change that order. She proposed a definition of a Black public as "an emergent collective composed of people who (a) engage in common discourses and negotiations of what it means to be Black, and (b) pursue particularly defined Black interests" (p. 454). This definition, she noted, allows for both heterogeneity and coalitions that include people who do not self-identify as Black yet identify with similar issues. My use of the term Ferguson counterpublic is similar to Squires' use of the Black public sphere.

The Internet, as Brock (2012) wrote, "maintains Western culture through its content and often embodies Western ideology through its design and practices" (pp. 531–532); therefore it is not "value-neutral" but rather mediates racial and cultural identity. This explains the emergence of what some have termed "Black Twitter," which Brock (2012) identifies as the "mediated articulations of a Black subculture" (p. 545; see also Manjoo, 2010; Meeder, 2012). Black Twitter thus becomes a space for what Gates (1983) termed "signifyin'," that is, articulating a shared worldview expressed through references to Black culture and Black idioms (Brock, 2012). According to Brock, Black Twitter calls the whiteness of online public space into question by disrupting the way that White experiences are taken as normal and invisible while racialized populations are visibly marginalized. Black Twitter is not a counterpublic but rather a space in which counterpublics may form as people find and follow one another, engage in discussions about the meanings of Blackness, and discuss strategies for engaging in political action that arise from those meanings. But it is also important to note that young people from historically underrepresented communities neither experience themselves as members of a singular community on- or off-line, nor uniformly choose to follow or interact online with elites who have emerged as political leaders.

In the United States, political participation correlates with higher parental educational levels and better schools (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2001). In privileged communities, schools may be understood as locations where young people are encouraged to draw connections between civic engagement and personal empowerment (Middaugh & Kahne, 2009). In contrast, young people from what de Finney and colleagues (2011) refer to as "minoritized" backgrounds are more likely to attend high schools that are underfunded and undersupported. They are more likely to experience their school contexts at least in part as an extension of a national discourse that emphasizes the containment of youth and embeds young minoritized "Others" into a racialized construct that privileges whiteness (Giroux, 1996). As Forman (2005) wrote in his study of Somali immigrant and refugee youths, young people of color "are regularly

denied adequate opportunities . . . to implement the values of their experiences and to collaborate meaningfully in the redefinition and reinvention of 'the nation'" (p. 10). They therefore orient themselves to their immediate families and peers and are skeptical of socially legitimated experts (Clark, 2015; Gray, 2009a). Members of minoritized groups thus have fewer connections to social movements and encounter more barriers to engagement (Juris, 2012). Given these points of departure, minoritized young people express skepticism about participation in large-scale collective action and do not necessarily want to see themselves as part of what they perceive as a "White" public. And yet, in spite of these barriers, as Banaji and Buckingham (2013) found in their study of youth and activism online, some young people alienated from politics are still motivated to identify, explore, and take action on issues of concern to them. And as this case study reveals, an event like a school walkout can bring their frustrations to the fore.

Method

This article examines how 22 young social media users were hailed into a counterpublic as online or off-line protests were organized and held in their high school. The school where this study took place is one of the city's most culturally diverse, with more than 40 different language groups and 60 countries represented in the student body. Students involved in this study were born in the United States, Mexico, Ghana, Ethiopia, Somalia, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Russia, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Those students born outside the United States had varying levels of English language proficiency and had been in the United States from two months to 12 years.

The findings from this article are based on a yearlong ethnographic project that explored how these minoritized young people became engaged in efforts to improve the interactions between students of color and members of law enforcement (Clark, 2015). Following Fine's (1994) insistence that White researchers must speak "up for" rather than "for" Others, my university students and I, most of whom were White and relatively privileged, recruited high school students of varying economic and ethnic backgrounds to serve as co-researchers into this issue. We spoke with the students in a series of two-hour weekly meetings and also participated in school-related activities over the course of one year for a total of more than sixty contact hours. These high school and university students conducted videotaped interviews with one another and with their peers about the role social media had played in how they had learned of and shared views about unfolding events in Ferguson, in their local area, and in their own high school.

Recorded interviews and field notes were viewed and analyzed jointly with the high school students using a constant comparative method that drew on grounded theory, critical discourse analysis, and youth participatory action research (Baumberg, 2004; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Charmaz, 1983; Clark 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Patterns were identified and presented to the students in an iterative and reflexive process prior to publication of this article (Clark 2012).

The School's Walkout and Rally

News of the nonindictments in the Michael Brown and Eric Garner cases broke during the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, when school was not in session. On the second day back in school, the city's largest urban high school staged a walkout. One news report quoted a member of the police union who labeled

the walkouts "unlawful" (McGhee, 2014). The following day, three other urban high schools joined in staging walkouts.

On that second day, students involved in this research project held tense conversations about Ferguson and the other schools' walkouts. They seemed to feel that most people at their school were listening rather than commenting on the activities. As a group, the students were reticent and tentative. I learned from them that whereas many of their teachers had offered general support for participation in the walkouts, only a few had discussed the reasons for the walkouts. These few teachers, the students said, had attempted to place the frustration and rage behind the walkouts in a larger historical context, noting that many in the African American community did not feel that either the police or the courts were there to protect them. One student in the discussion volunteered that this feeling may be due to the U.S. legacy of slavery, as the law during that time was used against the interests of minority communities and law enforcement protected the interests of slaveholders rather than slaves. Whereas this interpretation was consensually accepted during the in-person discussion, the students said they were reluctant to enter into the contested public spaces of online discussion about the unfolding events. As one student explained, in "heated situations" people can become the "targets" of others' aggression, and she did not want to put herself in a position to become such a target.

Later on, however, the same student who had been concerned about being a "target" reported excitedly that she had just received a text from another student saying that some in the school were organizing a walkout. Her enthusiasm was palpable as she frantically texted others in her social circles, seeking more information about where and when the walkout would take place and then reporting what she was learning to others in the room: "They're trying to decide if it's going to be tomorrow or the next day," she said to no one in particular. But this interaction, witnessed by the other students, caused a change in tone. The discussion no longer concerned what others had done but what this particular group of students might or might not do. In one of the school's computer labs, students quickly found news and alternative news images online, discussing news about neighboring schools that had participated in that day's walkout. Another student, when asked by an adult mentor whether she would attend her own school's walkout if indeed it were staged, was hesitant. Her parents would not want her to miss school, she said. Another volunteered that he had heard that the walkout at one school had led to a disciplinary lockdown in which no one was allowed to leave the school building. That student did not want his school to get a "bad reputation" for staging a walkout. Finally, several students noted that they did not believe they understood all the facts related to the protest. "What if someone asks me what I'm protesting for and I can't really explain it?" one wondered.

By the next day, many more students had heard about the possibility of a walkout through in-person and text conversations. A student organizer had set up a Facebook event page that quickly circulated throughout the student body. Another organizer stopped in at the school's front office to discuss the protest with the high school administration, who in turn alerted local law enforcement and parents that the school was going to stage a walkout in solidarity with the Ferguson protesters. Together, student organizers and teachers decided on a plan to walk around the nearby park, hold an outdoor rally, and then return to classes.

On the day of the scheduled walkout, students from the school held handmade signs reading "Respect" and chanted "hands up, don't shoot," the mantra associated with Michael Brown's arrest. They also shared photos with friends via Snapchat. But during the protest, the group split: Some students followed the original plan to walk and then rally at the school, whereas numerous other students elected to walk downtown to the grounds of their rival high school, where the first local school walkout had taken place. Much to the chagrin of the student organizers and school administrators, the rogue student protesters shut down a major thoroughfare, snarling traffic for more than an hour. Some reportedly shouted profanities. They were all eventually bussed back to their school.

"Come back!" students who had remained with the walkout's organizers had texted their friends. Many sent snaps with photos so that those who had begun the trek downtown would realize that not all students were heading downtown. These instantaneous communications were important in the chaos of the moment, as the school's principal used a bullhorn to try to stop the impromptu rogue protesters and the protest's organizers continued back toward the school. Students also texted and exchanged snaps with friends at the rival school downtown, alerting them that some had chosen to take the protest to their school grounds. That school went on lockdown, and students there texted and exchanged snaps with friends they saw outside, reportedly telling the rogue protesters to go back to their own school.

The split colored the experience for many and became central to the narrative students later told about their involvement in this activity. Those students in the research group who were friends of planners of the walkout described the walkout as a "disaster" and bemoaned the "chaos" that ensued. The meaning of the walkout became contested as students tried to make sense of what had happened and rumors circulated about who had led the rogue part of the walkout, and why. As one student explained, "One of my friends [who had helped to organize the rally and walkout] cried, because she was so upset that no one was paying attention to the real problem." But, this student continued, those who spoke at the rally after the walkout "did make an impact on the students who listened. I listened, and it made me further understand how they felt about it."

Before the walkout, students in the research group had observed that many of their peers had chosen to engage in online discussion about the Ferguson protests and related events in a somewhat tentative way, viewing a Tumblr, tweet, comment, or photo, and then tagging or @tweeting a friend or family member they knew to be sympathetic to the protesters' views, thereby identifying themselves as supportive to someone else they believed to be equally supportive. Others chose to "like" or "favorite" a message they encountered on someone else's feed, thus leaving a more public declaration of how their views comported with those of the protesters.

Still braver students chose to repost, retweet, or otherwise share a curated message more broadly in their own Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, or Instagram feeds, with or without commentary. The students reported that a few young people they knew had gone so far as to create their own Tumblr on the issue. But those who engaged in the reposting of curated content risked receiving negative comments or feedback from those in their social networks who disagreed with them. Responses could take on the form of online "microaggressions" (boyd, 2013). For example, a student who reposted a curated message supportive of the Ferguson protesters noted that although some peers "liked" his post, one tagged him in

a post that denigrated the protesters. Being tagged, he added, made him feel embarrassed and targeted, knowing that the tag meant that anyone reading the aggressor's page would recognize him as a Ferguson supporter whereas the aggressor was publicly declaring that he was not. A different student explained that it was hard to post about the walkouts on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter because "there are so many opinions." In this case, the student said, microaggressions took the form of judgment that those agreeing to the planned rally weren't going far enough. As she noted, online she encountered "opinions like, 'Oh, this is wrong and we should protest in more of an aggressive way than a peaceful way.'" As another student observed, "I think people are nervous and apprehensive about using their voice [after the walkout], because they don't want to be looked down on. And who could blame them?" Students who chose to express opinions about the protests and walkouts in any way therefore felt themselves to be entering contested social spaces where emotions were often heated because opinions were strong. Yet they also came to see the value of sharing evidence of their views and their participation online. As one student noted, "That's what's so good about social media: it builds up students as a group so that they can speak out about something they care about together, and not just individually, which creates a bigger impact."

Discussion: Artifacts of Engagement

Much research has already focused on how being involved in political action through protesting, as well as by photographing and texting about it, enhances a person's sense of emotional identification with a movement and its aims (Papacharissi, 2014). But what was particularly of interest in this case was what happened when those on the margins of political action, such as students who had been unsure about the walkouts, encountered firsthand evidence that others in their peer networks had already decided to walk out. In other words, it is worth focusing not only on the creators and circulators of most of the walkout's video or texts, but also on the more numerous recipients and viewers of that same material.

Not all of the students in this study decided to join the walkout as soon as they learned that others their age were involved in it, and many expressed hesitation even after learning that those in their peer networks were going to participate. But the conversation shifted noticeably as they encountered more and more images, texts, and other evidence of how people they knew had been involved, physically or emotionally, in these activities. It became difficult for them to remain indifferent to or isolated from the protests and the many discussions about them. Having been effectively sutured into the Ferguson counterpublic, they in turn faced the choice of whether or not to act. The comments, photos, videos, and stories were no longer simply the stories of unknown individuals. As they became artifacts of engagement shared online, these phenomena spoke of a form of political action writ large and inserted recognizable actors into the narrative.

I use the phrase "artifacts of engagement" to identify elements of the *digital material* that are significant for processes of connective action. Following Boomen and colleagues (2009), who wished to challenge the supposed immateriality of the digital, the digital material highlights various new media phenomena as "material assemblages of hardware, software, and wetware . . . configured by human actors, tools, and technologies in an intricate web of mutually shaping relations" (p. 9). When the students shared photos, memes, quoted sayings, and original or curated commentary that provided evidence of

their emotional investment in unfolding events, they were participating in actions that are not adequately explained by the fact that such artifacts were consequential in "real life." Rather, the concepts of the digital material and, by extension, the specific example of artifacts of engagement signal how difficult it is to separate objects, actions, platforms, and actors in the digital era because the digital material sits at the intersection of technological affordances, user interfaces, and social practices. In this sense, then, online artifacts of engagement are, to build on Latour (1991), "society made durable."

But such artifacts, particularly when shared via platforms such as Snapchat, are also highly ephemeral. The concept of the digital material—and in this case, artifacts of engagement—is therefore also related to Foucault's (1986) concept of *heterotopias of time*, as these artifacts exist both in and outside time, and reference a particular event even as they also transcend the specific event they reference. The artifacts themselves, when in the form of photos or quotes or passed-along items, are in part immediate and disposable (especially with Snapchat), but they also capture a moment that ostensibly happened in real life, which means there may be an archived or curated version available in more permanent form elsewhere. They are thus a form of ephemeral evidence. In such heterotopic spaces, as Foucault's concept suggests, many ways of knowing may occur simultaneously without any attempt at reconciliation or consistency. Artifacts are also political, as Winner (1980) argued. Offering a more nuanced view that contrasts with Winner's tendency to view artifacts through a determinative lens, Berg and Lie (1995) argued for a social-shaping-of-technology perspective that affirms that "technologies institute a period of instability and provide possibilities for change but . . . desirable changes had to be initiated by human action" (p. 337).

The sharing of these artifacts of engagement—comments, photos, videos, tweets, and news stories that were found or created and then passed along largely via Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter, as well as through texts—may not have been of the same order as participation in other political activities, but it provided an avenue into what Dahlgren (2009) called the "proto-political"—the important step whereby young people become aware of the collective limits of their situation and thus the possibility that things could change because of their own involvement in the action at hand. These artifacts thus became part of a nonlinear mesh of causality that moved less-involved students toward seeing participation as not just something others did, but something they themselves might also engage in. The artifacts thus functioned as personalized expressions of a collective counterpublic that propelled people toward connective action.

Artifacts of Engagement and Political Newcomers

Social network sites have become important "open channels" for communication about political action and have been thus associated with the mobilization of newcomers, particularly in locations where civic infrastructures are weak (Mercea, 2014). As young people shared their artifacts of engagement on their social networks, their activities and shared perspectives became visible to other members of their communities who might not consider such actions to be part of the repertoire of behaviors deemed appropriate for their group. This is important, as both strong collective identities and strongly felt shared grievances are known to play a central role in spurring members of one's extended social networks to consider participating for the first time (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995; Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009). Knowledge

that others in one's social circle are expressing their concern through action is a strong predictor of future participation (Schussman & Soule, 2005; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This then makes artifacts of engagement that signal a possible connection to an emergent social movement merit further investigation in the effort to understand the role of social media in fostering connective action. Also worth noting is the significance of the more immediate and less public forms of communication available on Snapchat, as young people at the margins, who may have been reluctant to voice support or opposition on Facebook or Twitter, found the barriers to entering into participation much lower when communication was primarily among a select circle. Through Snapchat, young people could express their views or call on their peers to act, thus signaling their membership in a nascent counterpublic in a less public yet still social setting that demanded attention and response. In an era of "corrupt personalization," to use Sandvig's (2014) term, when Facebook's algorithms increasingly expose viewers to what advertisers want them to hear and mute messages from their friends and peers, platforms like Snapchat may afford greater opportunities for personalized forms of participation that move people to connective action. But, as Tierney (2013) reminds us, such social media opportunities are never secured for all time. This leads to questions for future research, such as how differing platforms afford and discourage the sharing of emotionally laden artifacts of engagement, and how scholars might better understand the ways some tweets, memes, and photos become widely circulated among newcomers as emblems of an emergent movement that they wish to be part of.

Conclusion

Reflecting on findings of an ethnographic study of young students of color engaged in discussing social media use in relation to events unfolding in Ferguson, in their city, and in their school community, this article has argued that as students encountered evidence of how their peers and others in their communities participated in political dissent through social media, they may have been able to overcome fears, muster the courage to participate, and find themselves hailed as members of counterpublics.

As Tufecki and Wilson have argued (2012), digital activism, like activism occurring in the streets, is not without costs. When students in this study encountered evidence that others agreed with their stances or actions, they became more willing to consider greater involvement themselves. Meanwhile, they were also aware that the open-ended nature of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook made it likelier they would encounter resistance when they expressed views or engaged in actions related to contentious politics. Snapchat was an attractive alternative that allowed students to select recipients and share specific messages. Snapchat also became primary during the actual protest event, as it let students instantaneously relay messages that demanded immediate attention. The use of differing social platforms for different kinds of communication demonstrates the variety of strategies students were able to use as they and their peers were hailed into an emergent post-Ferguson counterpublic and compelled to negotiate the contested public spaces of social media.

Newcomers to political activities like the students in this study are, of course, not embedded in the relationships that make up formal and informal movement networks. Nonetheless, "first-timers" come to these new activities as members of various other communities and networks. Whereas a great deal of existing research has focused primarily on the outcomes of such participation for individuals who are full

participants, or on members of social movement organizations and their goals, this case study instead draws attention to individuals who are marginally involved in political action. By exploring participants at the political margins and their relationships with other communities and networks outside the realm of the current political action, the article extends the horizon of when and how to think about possible ways of transforming political awareness into political action, and how to conceptualize the role of social media in this process.

This finding confounds prior theories that presumed that casual online and largely observation-only participation could be dismissed as mere "slacktivism." The study suggests instead that such casual observation may play an important role as a form of early participation that is made possible by digitally networked communication, even as the opportunities to observe those artifacts are increasingly limited as the structures of commercial social network sites continue to shift. The article therefore concludes that further studies of social media's role in early political participation among minoritized communities across a variety of social media platforms are needed to enrich theories of the role of social media usage in long-term political change.

This article has therefore attempted to flesh out the concept of artifacts of engagement, observing six characteristics of these phenomena:

1. *Artifacts of engagement play a role in constructing contested public spaces*. As their peers decided to organize and then participate in a school walkout, students were inevitably hailed into the Ferguson counterpublic. Having become members, they then had to figure out what to do about that, and how or whether to participate in related actions.

2. *Artifacts of engagement contain the proto-political or potentially political, and can be shared in various communication settings both online and off-line.* Studying what people share across settings leads to better conceptualization of the ways that counterpublics form across differing platforms and aids in interrogation of the relationship between platform affordances and possibilities for encouragement to action.

3. *Artifacts of engagement speak through the language of emotions and as such can serve to draw people into action.* They bring together affective publics and counterpublics, and propel people toward participation (Papacharissi, 2014). But they can also take the form of online microaggressions that serve as a deterrent, especially when they occur among friends and acquaintances.

4. *When artifacts of engagement are shared, they help produce heterotopias* that allow many possible ways of knowing to be brought together but do not attempt to reconcile them. Recipients of these artifacts therefore view themselves as the ultimate authority over their own knowledge, sometimes recognizing those limits but more often unaware of them.

5. *Artifacts of engagement are manifestations of the digital material*. What is important is not just the photo, meme, or quote itself; rather, the item gains meaning because it was shared by someone known to the recipient. These artifacts therefore become imbued with meanings that, though understood

as actively lived and felt, still have not gained full expression but may lead to new starting points and new conclusions (Williams, 1977, p. 131).

6. *The consequences of the sharing of artifacts of engagement are never fully secured, because sharing takes place in commercial settings that are beyond the control of the sharers*. Thus, whereas such sharing may open new possibilities for forming counterpublics and calling marginal participants to action, these artifacts and those who share and receive them are subject to surveillance and limitation according to the prerogatives of the platforms through which they are shared.

This article has argued that when people participate in political action for the first time and choose to share artifacts of that engagement with minoritized others via Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other social media platforms, they participate in hailing a counterpublic into being. This sharing of artifacts with those in their networks who, like them, are also at some distance from the mainstream, gives people in their networks the opportunity to consider and possibly render meaningful those artifacts of engagement shared by their friends or family members on social media. The act of using social media to share the artifacts of one's engagement in political action is therefore a potentially compelling means of garnering support for an alternative vision that can further mobilize counterpublics toward political action. In other words, even participation at the margins and its representation in social media matters; it just may matter to different groups, and on a different time frame, than our theories have invited us to pay attention to at present.

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