

**ARTICLE**

# Youth, activism, and social movements

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Political.**Abstract**

There has been considerable debate over the extent and role of young people's political participation. Whether considering popular hand-wringing over concerns about declines in young people's institutional political participation or dismissals of young people's use of online activism, many frame youth engagement through a "youth deficit" model that assumes that adults need to politically socialize young people. However, others argue that young people are politically active and actively involved in their own political socialization, which is evident when examining youth participation in protest, participatory politics, and other forms of noninstitutionalized political participation. Moreover, social movement scholars have long documented the importance of youth to major social movements. In this article, we bring far flung literatures about youth activism together to review work on campus activism; young people's political socialization, their involvement in social movement organizations, their choice of tactics; and the context in which youth activism takes place. This context includes the growth of movement societies, the rise of fan activism, and pervasive Internet use. We argue that social movement scholars have already created important concepts (e.g., biographical availability) and questions (e.g., biographical consequences of activism) from studying young people and urge additional future research.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Public distress over the level of youth civic and political engagement is common, whether one considers Putnam's (2000) exaltation of the "greatest generation" and his concerns about the relative disengagement of young people, or Gladwell's (2010) indictment of online activism, which is so popular among, and associated with, youth. In fact, around the turn of the century, a range of scholars began to worry that youth political engagement was at an unhealthy low (Delli Carpini, 2000; Mann, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Wilkins, 2000). Surveys found that youth were less interested in politics, less likely to keep up with the news, and less likely to be members of advocacy organizations (Delli Carpini, 2000).<sup>1</sup> A number of scholars reacted by arguing that youth engagement was not declining, just changing form.<sup>2</sup> Dalton (2009), and others, argue it is not that youth are disengaged, but rather that they do not engage in the same way that "dutiful" generations have. Instead, youth have shifted to an "engaged citizenship" model by volunteering (Shea & Harris, 2006), protesting, and embedding politics in their daily lives (Schlozman, Verba, &

Brady, 2010; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). Youth also engage in participatory politics, in which political news and opinions are expressed, consumed, and remixed peer-to-peer through online social networks (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

Of course, despite this vigorous debate, social movement scholars have long realized that young people have been, and continue to be, critical to the rise of many social movements and social movement organizations (SMOs) over the last 50 years. Student contributions include (but are not limited to) the New Left, the Free Speech movement, lunch counter sit-ins to push for desegregation, campus campaigns for anti-apartheid divestment, anti-sweatshop activism, the DREAMers, and Black Lives Matter. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the landscape of activism in the United States without the efforts of young people.

Given the importance of young people to activism and claims that youth are increasingly turning toward protest, scholars might expect that a consolidated literature on youth activism exists. In actuality, relevant work is scattered across different literatures and disciplines. In this review, we bring several of the most central literatures together: (a) social movements research on campus activism, which marked some of the initial social movement research on youth; (b) research on political socialization, which is more interdisciplinary in nature; (c) social movement research on youth participation in activist organizations; (d) research on intersectionality and youth participation, which connects both with youth socialization and research on activist organizations; and (e) research on the changing context in which youth participate, which includes a radically different digital media environment.

## 2 | CAMPUS ACTIVISM

Early relevant research documented the critical role of young, often university educated, people in the Civil Rights movement, which included pivotal roles in the rise and diffusion of sit-ins throughout the south in the early 1960s (Biggs, 2006; Morris, 1981) and participation in the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign that registered African-Americans in Mississippi to vote (McAdam, 1988). Researchers also found students active on other campuses during this time: students organized the Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley (Draper, 1965), and played key roles in the anti-Vietnam war movement (Gamson, 1991; Klatch, 1999) and the women's rights movement (Buechler, 1990), among many others. Research continued to find campus activism to be important, such as work on the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s (Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991). Contemporary movements like Occupy Wall Street, the DREAMer movement, the movement to end sexual assault, and #BlackLivesMatter continue to recruit and mobilize young people on high school and college campuses.

This long history of activism makes sense because campuses have many benefits for organizing. Campuses are ecologically beneficial for recruitment, mobilization, and coalition building because many students live in residence halls, or in close proximity to the school, and have free time between or after classes to discuss issues and organize (Enriquez, 2014; Van Dyke, 1998; Zhao, 1998). In her analysis of the diffusion of the shantytown protests across campuses in the 1980s, Soule (1997) finds that the protests were more likely on elite, liberal arts colleges, and spread to activists at similar colleges. Indeed, others have found that student activism is more likely at elite colleges and at universities with high enrollment (Bloom, 1987; Lipset, 1971; Orbell, 1967; Rojas, 2007; Van Dyke, 2003; Van Dyke, Dixon, & Carlon, 2007). Campus activism can also endure across generations because of existing subcultures of activism (Van Dyke, 1998), which can affect tactical trajectories as well (Binder & Wood, 2013). Its endurance is doubly beneficial because colleges are obvious, often sympathetic, targets for protest (Walker, Martin, & McCarthy, 2008), and student movements have won significant concessions through demonstrations and rallies (Arthur, 2016; Rojas, 2007).

Campuses also facilitate important changes for youth. Munson (2010) argues that college life creates "transitional moments" for youth by altering their everyday routines and social networks, greatly enhancing the chances for activism in the process. Newer, broader social networks also make coalitional work on campus easier (Enriquez, 2014; Van Dyke, 2003) and expand the possibility students will become more committed to activism, and increases

the chance that their participation “spills over” into participation in other social movements (Meyer & Whittier, 1994) or continues on with other campaigns (Hirsch, 1990; McAdam, 1988; Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013; Whalen & Flacks, 1980). Social movement participation can have lasting biographical consequences for participants, including long term impacts on marriage and divorce rates and occupational decisions (see for reviews of this work: Giugni, 2004; Klatch, 1999; McAdam, 1988; McAdam, 1989). Although this work has continued, and examines newer cohorts and different countries now (e.g., Lee & Chan, 2016), the original work in this area resulted from studies of what happened to young and college-age participants from the 1960s as they aged.

Interestingly, one of the more general and lasting contributions of this work to social movement scholarship has been an explanation of what may be theoretically distinct about youth that might drive so much participation, net of the campus environment. Young, unmarried, unemployed, and childless people are more likely to participate in activism, particularly high-risk activism (McAdam, 1988). Scholars have attributed this to their greater free time and limited social obligations, conceptually referring to it as “biographical availability.” Subsequent research on micromobilization has continued to treat biographical availability as a central concern (e.g., Caren, Ghoshal, & Ribas, 2011; Schussman & Soule, 2005).

### 3 | POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

While research on campus activism focused primarily on colleges (even though substantial activism in high schools also occurred in the 1960s and beyond) and was conducted by social movement scholars, an interdisciplinary field on political socialization developed separately—drawing insights from communications, political science, developmental psychology, and sociology—to examine how youth learn to engage in the political process (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2013; McIntosh & Youniss, 2010). This work considered political development from late adolescence through early adulthood (Andolina et al., 2003; Braungart & Braungart, 1986), and while this field is too large to be adequately reviewed here, key points relevant to youth activism can be identified.

Most importantly, work on political socialization has challenged common views of youth socialization and engagement, often referred to as the “deficit model” (Osler & Starkey, 2003). Despite notably contradictory empirical evidence, youth are, or are perceived to be, less engaged than adults (Putnam, 2000), and are often treated as incomplete members of society who have to be taught how to correctly engage with politics (Andersson, 2015; Gordon, 2007; Henn & Foard, 2014). This deficit model of youth political engagement creates barriers for youth engagement by assuming that youth are not interested in politics, and denying youth agency in their own political socialization. Counterintuitively, though, much of that adult-to-youth socialization also treats youth as akin to little adults who lack distinct political interests and concerns from adults (Elliot, Earl, & Maher, 2017). Recent research on political socialization challenges this deficit model: Youth are not politicized by others; political socialization is something that they do for themselves (Yates & Youniss, 1999). Indeed, youth, in some cases, can even play a role in politicizing their parents (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008).

Instead of families and institutions teaching kids how to correctly engage in politics, youth are developing their own political socialization through their experiences, whether those experiences are discussing political issues, engaging in political activities, or participating in programs and institutions. As Youniss et al. (2002), explain “[f]amilies, schools, service activities, and involvement in political events provide raw material—knowledge, models, and reflective matter—and various forms of feedback, but it is ultimately the youth themselves who synthesize this material, individually, and collaboratively, in ways that make sense to them.”

Thus, families and social networks influence youth's own active socialization by exposing youth to the political process through facilitating conversations, guiding their experience with the political process, and teaching them how the political system operates (Andolina et al., 2003; Ojeda & Hatemi, 2015; Youniss et al., 2002). In addition, schools expose youth to issues, offer opportunities to express their opinions and to learn to participate (Andolina

et al., 2003; Kahne, Crow, & Lee 2013; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Wyn & White, 1996). However, research shows that there are also obstacles that come with expanding civic engagement; namely, failing to think through or convey the skills necessary for youth to participate politically (Bessant, 2004; Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005).

Taken together, this work shows that family, friends, and school are neither necessary nor sufficient for political socialization, but, nonetheless, provide the raw materials that youth use to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be politically engaged (Andolina et al., 2003; Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Klatch, 1999; Lee et al., 2013). Another way to think of this is that social networks, friends, and family offer engagement opportunities, which are raw materials for youth's own socialization. Of course, social networks, friends, family, and school can also play indirect, albeit important, roles in the political socialization process by mediating how youth engage with and process political information (Hensby, 2014; Lee et al., 2013; Nekmat, Gower, Gonzenbach, & Flanagan, 2015).

Research on experiences with friends, families and schools, and on youth's information access also shows that social media and internet usage can have impacts; usage can facilitate political socialization by offering another line of influence for friends, family, and schools (Boulianne, 2015), or by providing independent opportunities for youth to discuss and engage with political issues (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell 2013; Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014). After all, social media and Internet usage are now an integral part of how youth engage with their family and social networks on activist and political issues (Maher & Earl, 2016).

## 4 | YOUTH AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

A significant line of contemporary research examines how young people connect with and relate to SMOs. Research largely shows that many youth find adult-dominated activist spaces to be too dismissive of youth's concerns and agency (O'Donoghue & Strobel, 2007), even though youth are more likely to participate if they see their activism as meaningful (Velasquez & LaRose, 2014; Winston, 2013). This is true offline and online (Khalil, 2012). Indeed, most SMOs do little to explicitly invite youth participation through their websites (Elliott & Earl, 2015), although sites often discuss content that could be relevant to young people. Even in spaces set up specifically for youth, such as youth advisory councils (Taft & Gordon, 2013); adult-directed political socialization is incongruent with how youth perceive themselves, leading some to start their own youth-centered organizations (Gordon & Taft, 2011). These spaces tend to have flat hierarchies, enjoy well-connected online networks, and use creative direct actions (Juris & Pleyers, 2009).

Gordon (2007, 2009) analyzes both youth-led and entirely youth-based organizations. For example, a youth-led activist group in Oakland, composed primarily of lower-class youth of color, organized activist workshops for other youth and lobbied their schools for student-centered improvements. While adults were involved, they took on ally or support roles, providing help when needed. But, a Portland area youth group, composed primarily of White, middle-class youth, did not allow adult involvement within the organization, and would only occasionally partner with adult-lead organizations to plan events, and even then, tended to be wary of the adults in partner organizations (Gordon, 2007).

Even with friction between adults and young people, adults can still play a vital role in youth-led organizations in a number of ways (Gordon, 2009; Gordon, 2015; O'Donoghue & Strobel, 2007; Taft, 2014a; Taft & Gordon, 2015). Adults can provide access to resources and networks otherwise unavailable to youth, which can be especially important for poor and minority youth; serve as role models and mentors, helping youth develop their own political selves; and provide stability to organizations with higher rates of turnover in members as youth age out of the organization (Franklin, 2014; Taft & Gordon, 2015). However, these intergenerational relationships are always at risk of falling into ageist habits that amplify the adults' voices and opinions at the expense of youth (e.g. Taft, 2014a).

Our discussion of youth in activist organizations should not suggest that youth activism is only engaged through organizations. For instance, there is some evidence that youth are increasingly participating in market-based

advocacy, using tactics such as boycotts and “buycotts” to express their political opinions (Zukin et al., 2006). While not specifically focused on youth, work on political consumption finds that much of this activity happens outside of organizations (Earl, Copeland, & Bimber, forthcoming).

## 5 | INTERSECTIONALITY AND YOUTH ACTIVISM

Research on the intersectional identities of youth draws together research on political socialization, youth participation in activist organizations, and social movements more broadly by focusing on the gendered and racialized experiences of youth activists.

### 5.1 | Youth activism and gender

In terms of socialization, researchers argue that young women particularly suffer as a result of the deficit model (Gordon, 2008; Taft, 2006; Taft, 2010; Taft, 2014b). Girls are often faced with a general activist identity that devalues their identities as girls, forcing them to do additional identity work to make their identities congruent (Taft, 2010). In other words, an activist identity assumes an older and less feminine identity. Girls must work to legitimize a girl identity within their activist identity. For instance, some girls work to reinterpret feminism so it speaks more directly to their experience as girls (Keller, 2012). Girls often define politics narrowly—limiting it to what politicians tend to do—which may lead girls to not identify their interests and activities as political, even when broader definitions of politics would (Taft, 2006).

In terms of activist organizations, girls also face stronger opposition to their activism from parents (Gordon, 2008; McAdam, 1988), leading them to drop out of activist youth organizations more often than boys. However, adult mentors within youth activist organizations can help mitigate parental concerns about their children's political activities. Within youth activist organizations, girls often face the same sexism that adult women face in similar spaces, resulting in young male activists dominating the conversation and leadership roles (Gordon, 2008).

### 5.2 | Youth activism and race

In the last few decades, a great deal of social concern has been focused on youth of color, often painting youth as inherently criminal or deviant (Clay, 2012; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). New policies designed to address these concerns have resulted in increasing incarceration rates among youth of color, and increasing state-based surveillance of youth activities (Ginwright & James, 2002; Kwon, 2013). This context has driven a new generation of youth to become involved in social justice activism, drawing on intersectional approaches to youth and racial identities (Clay, 2012; Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, 2007; Ginwright, 2010; Kwon, 2013). Policy decisions and debates have also prompted activism among immigrant youth. For instance, so-called DREAMers have challenged the United States immigration policies (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014; Terriquez, 2015). These activists, who are primarily high school and college age, came to the United States when they were very young, and are notable for their willingness to be public about their undocumented status.

The same processes that prompt activism among youth of color can also serve as barriers to participation. For undocumented youth, participation runs the risk of deportation (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). For youth of color, a presumption of inherently being at risk of criminality means acting “uncivilly” runs the risk of incarceration (Kwon, 2013). It is not surprising, then, that minority youth are often thought to be less politically engaged than their White peers (Fridkin, Kenney, & Crittenden, 2006; Paulsen, 1991; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Zukin et al., 2006), and one might expect this pattern holds for social movement participation as well. But reported differences do not take into account how differences in resources (Verba et al., 1995) or access to reflective political representation (Broockman, 2013) affect willingness to participate. Indeed, when resources are taken into account, researchers have found that minorities “overparticipate” in politics (Brown & Brown, 2003; Verba & Nie, 1972). More recent work

focusing on digital media and digital activism finds that minorities are active in online campaigns (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015), but still less active than whites overall (Elliott & Earl, forthcoming; Best & Krueger, 2005). But, when one broadens the lens to participatory politics, this is not the case (Cohen et al., 2012).

Youth of color may also face additional barriers to participation within activist organizations. Scholarship has found that few organizations engage in intersectional mobilization and recruitment strategies (Elliott, Earl, & Maher, 2017; Strolovitch, 2008), leading to a lack of opportunities targeted explicitly to people of color. Youth of color are likely to experience a double penalty in this regard, both for their age and for their racial and ethnic identities. These barriers are especially consequential for youth of color, because of the social capital these youth gain from participating in community and activist organizations (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Taines, 2012).

## 6 | CHANGING CONTEXT FOR YOUTH ACTIVISM

Although one could highlight a wide-range of important contextual influences on the pace and shape of youth activism, we focus on two (a) the development of movement societies, which may help to make protest a common problem-solving heuristic for youth, even if youth use protest in nontraditional ways; and (b) the development of fan-based activism, including both culturally-focused contention and contention that crosses over into explicitly political terrain.<sup>4</sup>

### 6.1 | Movement societies

Work by Dalton (2009) and others (e.g. Bennett, 2008) suggest that young people's move toward protest instead of more institutional political activity like voting and working through political parties results from changing dispositions about the meaning of citizenship and/or the unpalatable state of institutional politics. However, alternative explanations—such as the development of so-called movement societies—may also contribute to this shift. At its most general level, movement society theory holds that protests have become a normal part of Western democracies for both youths and adults (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998a; Meyer & Tarrow, 1998b). This “institutionalization” of protest is observable through a number of metrics, including the on-going persistence of protest (Caren et al., 2011; Rucht, 1998), increasing numbers of large protest events, the diffusion of protest to new groups (Caren et al., 2011; Soule & Earl, 2005) and/or new claims (Earl & Kimport, 2009; Soule & Earl, 2005), and the widescale use of “insider tactics,” such as petitioning and boycotting, which tend to be less disruptive, and/or on tactics embedded in everyday life (Earl, Copeland, & Bimber, forthcoming).

When one digs deeper into movement society theory, though, there are actually two different theoretical arguments at work: an SMO-centered version that sees increasing professionalization leading to institutionalization (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998a) and a version that sees protest as becoming a more general problem-solving heuristic that is applied to a large array of topics and subjects that have not historically been the subject of protest (Earl & Kimport, 2009). It is that from research already reviewed that youth are engaged with SMOs, and other research points to youth participation in nongovernment organizations (e.g., Raby, 2014) and broader movements (e.g., Kennelly, 2011). Thus, movement societies may be affecting youth in this way.

However, it is also possible that protest as a heuristic for solving problems and challenging more powerful actors has become so modular that it is no longer anchored to traditional protest concerns, which could drive substantial youth activism, whether that activism is about school policies, a movie casting decision, or desired changes to favored video games (Earl & Kimport, 2009). This is consistent with work on fan activism (Earl & Schussman, 2008), as discussed shortly, and also with substantial youth participation in political consumerism (Zukin et al., 2006), particularly when that political consumption is self-directed instead of occurring in reaction to an organizational mobilization call (Earl et al., forthcoming). In other words, this strand of movement society theory suggests that youth are engaging in protest more because protest has become such a go-to, modular, flexible tool for displaying a desire to change, not

because of some changing internal value dispositions about citizenship and/or the altered meaning of different kinds of political engagement to youth.

## 6.2 | Fan activism

Fan activism exists in two forms (a) activism about specific cultural products or practices, which can be understood as a kind of cultural contention; and (b) explicitly political activism driven by fan communities, as occurs through the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), which brings together Harry Potter fans to improve the world and their communities. Both have increased over time (Earl & Kimport, 2009). We acknowledge, of course, that fans can be of all ages and fan communities exist around a wide variety of products and genres. For instance, Scardaville (2005) focuses on soap opera-related fan activism while Earl and Schussman (2008) examine more youth-oriented products. While not all work on fan activism is youth-focused, much is, and we argue that social movement scholars have a number of things they could learn from looking at this work.

First, social movement scholars have much to learn from studying how young people and consumers more broadly have become more active and demanding, even when these demands stay strictly within the cultural sphere and have no overtly political dimensions.<sup>5</sup> Jenkins (1992, 2006) argues that fan activism results from more engaged consumers desire to no longer be vanquished from the production of culture. Whether by becoming producers themselves (e.g. fan fiction) or attempting to influence the design or availability of products, a large number of young people are challenging cultural producers and authorities. These culturally-focused protests also create formative experiences for youth, and help to lay the groundwork for more explicit politicization of the cultural landscape, as has occurred, for instance, around the #OscarsSoWhite Twitter campaign, protests over Target's decision to ungender toys and bathrooms, or longstanding feminist protest over Barbie-related products. While many social movement scholars dismiss this, we argue it provides important insight into cultural contention and the politicization of markets.

Research also shows that fan communities represent a different recruitment stream for engaging young people in overtly political activism. For instance, the HPA promotes and mobilizes youth activism using a shared connection and admiration for Harry Potter and has a largely online organizing presence. The idea behind HPA is that if one admires Harry Potter's world, one should endeavor to make their own world more Potteresque. Or, as one of the founders of HPA notes, HPA hopes to "usher in an era of activism that is fun, imaginative, and sexy, yet truly effective" (Slack, 2011). While large-scale quantitative work comparing HPA and other fan activists has yet to be done, anecdotally it seems that many HPA members do not come from activist backgrounds but have become engaged in issues about, for instance, child labor by learning about protesting the use of non-fair-trade chocolate in producing Harry Potter-themed candy. Other research has also identified mobilization pathways for youth through online games and/or bulletin board systems (Beyer, 2014). Finding ways to mobilize young people through their existing interests, especially when those interests have not already put youth at risk of being mobilized by traditional SMOs, could be important to growing new cohorts of activists.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

The scholarship we reviewed collectively stresses the importance of not considering young people, their relationship to activism, and their political interests as being automatically analogous to adults, or as being a special case of (adult) activism. While scholarship relevant to understanding youth activism appears in a wide variety of literatures (e.g., literatures on youth civic and political engagement, campus activism, political socialization, youth engagement in SMOs, political consumption, and fan activism) and in a wide variety of fields (e.g., sociology, political science, communication, education, and youth studies to name only the primary fields), this work shares an emphasis on youth agency (a point we return to shortly), the challenges youth face when interacting with organizations and institutions, and the promise



and tensions that adults (whether as family, friends, or movement leaders) introduce into youth activism. Youth activism is also impacted by a wide variety of contextual factors, whether that be the acrimony of institutionalized politics (which may drive youth away), the rise of movement societies and fan activism (which expands the terrain for youth protest and may pull young people into protest), and the pervasive use of Internet-based technologies (which we treated by integrating work on digital media throughout this article).

One goal of this review is to showcase the breadth of work related to youth activism for scholars who do not study youth activism but who do study social movements. Because this work occurs across so many fields, but with only pockets of it happening in the study of social movements, it is easy for many social movement scholars to underestimate the volume of work being done on youth activism. It is also easy to overlook the important theoretical contributions, such as theoretical arguments about biographical availability and the biographical consequences of activism, that have come out of research primarily about youth. Indeed, were social movement scholars to dig deeper, trying to further excavate other key insights derived from work on young people, we suspect they would find more. For instance, youth may have had a particularly outsized impact on research on tactical innovation in social movements. Movements must innovate in order to effectively agitate for change, but more seasoned activists (in most cases, adults) may be more likely to draw on the same tactical repertoires that they used for past campaigns (McAdam, 1983; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004). In contrast, youth may be more prone to develop or adopt new or novel tactics online (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Gaby & Caren, 2012) and off (Soule, 1997; Williams, 2015; Wood, 2007).

We also argue that it is important for the wider field of social movement studies to not consider youth activism to be indistinguishable from adult activism. Even though young people have been incredibly important to the history of activism, youth face a range of dilemmas around activism, including being taken seriously by movements and SMOs. Moreover, it is important for the field to understand youth activism because while youth will age into adulthood, they will only age out of some of the dispositions, habits, and routines they developed as young people, which could have significant consequences for the future of social movements and protest (Earl, 2013). For instance, while fan activism may not have been important in social movement scholarship in the past, it may deserve, or even require, more substantial attention in the future. Moreover, early socialization experiences and early engagement with activism is incredibly influential on trajectories of engagement across the lifespan, making youth engagement important to the long term rise and fall of movements.

Another goal of this review has been to help scholars studying youth activism to situate their efforts within the breadth of relevant scholarship and to develop a broader, more unified, and more self-conscious literature on the topic. On the one hand, this is partly to help researchers situate their work better and also connect with the broader array of scholars doing relevant work. But, the review also surfaces important common findings. For instance, the common thread of youth agency is apparent in much of this work, whether one is focused on histories of campus activism, attacks on the deficit model by scholars studying political socialization, or researchers interested in youth-centered activist organizations. That is, young people, as active learners and decision-makers, who may have distinct interests, and have intersectional identities that include being young, need to be studied with agency in mind. This is not to deny the range of institutions and structures relevant to youth activism, whether family, friends, schools, or social stratification, among others, but rather to rebut the tacit belief by many that adults need to manage and control youth activism.

It is also interesting to note that adult women and adults of color have also struggled in obtaining leadership positions or being heard in many SMOs. Thus, while many scholars studying youth engagement in SMOs highlight the struggles that girls and young people of color face in activist organizations and movements, these struggles have long histories for women and people of color generally, even if the dynamics are certainly impacted by age/youth identities.

Finally, we also believe that researchers in each of these areas may benefit from considering the questions and answers from other youth-oriented research areas. For instance, work on political socialization and campus activism may benefit from additional attention to intersectionality and the problems faced by young women and youth of



color. Researchers in these fields may also want to interrogate what the meaningful causal differences are between college and K-12 environments (if any) and/or relevant developmental or life course differences between K-12 students and college students. Even though both literatures are talking about young people, schools, and activism, research on campus activism has been distant from research on political learning. If one were to look at the lack of overlap in much of this literature, there appears to be a divide between precollege and college age activism that might not be empirically supportable. But, if it is, researchers need to be more specific about why such separate literatures are necessary.

Research on youth organizations may benefit from contextualizing these experiences within broader trends such as the rise of movements societies, fan activism, and the growing use of social media and the Internet. We, for instance, know little about how these youth-centered organizations use social media or how that may differentially impact young women or youth of color. Without the wider context of the research assembled here, identifying these kinds of interventions would be difficult.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Recent research, though, finds that youth participation in electoral politics has increased since 2000 (Fisher, 2012).
- <sup>2</sup> Other scholars attempted to explain young people's disengagement, arguing that this was not the fault of youth so much as the result of substantial cynicism regarding the political process (Henn, Weinstein, & Wring, 2002; Strama, 1998; Zukin et al., 2006). These scholars argued that the increasing visibility of political scandals and decreasing sense of responsiveness on the part of politicians to their constituency fed the political cynicism of a generation of young people.
- <sup>3</sup> Although we contextualize work on youth activism within larger debates over the level and form of youth civic and political engagement more generally, we do not review the substantial literatures on youth and electoral politics (Fisher, 2012), youth and civic engagement, or youth and online participation in political activities other than activism.
- <sup>4</sup> Both of the two trends—the shift toward movement societies and the rise of fan activism—are arguably tied to the rising use of Internet-enabled technologies as well. Moreover, pervasive internet use and substantial social media use by young people suggests that considering digital media as a context for youth activism is critically important. That said, there is little work that focuses specifically on digital media and youth activism, despite sprawling literatures on digital media and activism (which does not focus specifically on youth), digital media and youth (which does not focus specifically on activism), and youth and civic engagement, institutional political engagements, or participatory politics writ large (which does not focus on activism or digital media specifically). Instead, we discuss research on digital media and youth protest participation throughout this article, positioning it as part of the larger stream of work on youth and activist participation. This both better represents the field and avoids treating digital and analog settings as if they are unrelated, which does not map onto young people's experience.
- <sup>5</sup> Political consumerism, of course, represents another way in which consumers can become active, and interestingly, youth also participate in high rates there as well (Zukin et al., 2006).

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