

**Civic Identity in the Digital Age:**  
**An investigation into the civic experiences of**  
**American young people**

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*“Children, after all, are not just adults-in-the-making. They are people whose current needs and rights and experiences must be taken seriously.”*  
— *Alfie Kohn*



# Abstract

Contemporary society is characterized by digitally mediated interactions and activities, especially through social media. As young people discover their identities, they make decisions about how to present themselves to others, and they develop an understanding of how they fit into society, what it means to be a citizen and to be civically engaged, and how to effectively engage in the political world. Literature reveals the lack of an adequate framework for understanding how young people come to develop their civic identity in contemporary times. This study therefore explores three research questions: 1) In what ways do young people, ages 14 through 17, present themselves to others in contemporary society? 2) What are the mechanisms through which young people form their civic identity in this era, and how do young people understand citizenship and civic engagement? 3) What are the means through which young people engage in the political world, and what factors contribute to this engagement?

Using in-depth interviews with 46 participants of diverse backgrounds, this study investigated how young people in the United States aged 14 through 17 conceptualize their civic identities in today's world. In the United States, the tradition of education for democratic citizenship has declined in recent decades due to a focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Young people have thus not received adequate civic education, and the public has consequently perceived them as disengaged from the political world. Despite this public perception, a growing body of research indicates that young people are civically engaged in non-traditional ways, and there is an assumption that the use of technology among young people will elevate their voices and civic actions. This study finds that while young people are civically engaged, and despite the multitude of digital media that could be used to amplify their voices and causes, they still feel their voices are unheard. These findings highlight certain areas where educators, parents, and policymakers can improve their support for young people's civic identity formation and feeling that their voices will make a difference. This thesis therefore proposes a new framework for civic identity to reflect the experiences of young people in the digital era, and recommends a reinvigoration of civic education to foster young people's civic efficacy in contemporary society.



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## **Chapter One | Introduction**

# **The Need to Investigate the Civic Experiences of Young People**

### **1.1 Motivation for Research**

In contemporary society, the meaning of citizenship and what it means to be civically engaged is shaped by individuals' experiences of citizenship. However, for decades, research on the meaning of citizenship has been based in theoretical understandings of adults' conceptualizations and experiences of citizenship, a concept that has always consisted of multiple meanings and understandings (Ellis, Hálfðánarson, & Isaacs, 2006). Citizenship includes legal and social components (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992; Osler & Starkey, 2006; 2018): the rights, duties, and privileges within a political collective (Olsen, 2012), and a sense of belonging (Flanagan, 2013) and the privilege connected with that belonging (Bellamy, 1998). These theories of understanding citizenship have led researchers to further develop models and styles of citizenship to include membership and participation (Bennett, 2008; Kerr & Cleaver, 2009; Thun, 2016).

Despite this widespread understanding that adults understand citizenship in these thematic areas, there is limited empirical research examining the themes and theories of citizenship as it is experienced and conceptualized by young people before they reach adulthood, especially in contemporary society. Today, young people are experiencing the world in a more digitally mediated manner than previous generations, and scholars have described changes in citizenship alongside how technology is involved in civic engagement (Bennett, 2008; Schudson, 1998). The most recent and relevant studies of

the civic experiences of young people took place in the early 2000s (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003). Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) conducted an empirical study of how young people in a British city perceive citizenship and their own transitions as citizens. Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) presented a framework for understanding how young people between the ages of 16 and 23 conceptualize citizenship, but did not address civic engagement or technology. This study was conducted prior to the introduction of social media and other technologies into daily life. Contemporary society is marked by a culture of digitally sharing our lives and opinions with others (Watkins, 2009), and has been well documented (boyd, 2007b; Ito, et al., 2010; Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker, 2015; Xenos & Foot, 2008). While young people in the United States consume and create digital content (Coleman & Rowe, 2005; Lenhart & Madden, 2005), most often, young people are using technology to interact with their friends, with 72 per cent of young people ages 13 through 17 communicating with their friends through social media (Lenhart, 2015).

With the understanding that experiences are increasingly digitally mediated, Bennett, Wells, and Freelon (2011) conducted an analysis of United States-based web sites operated by a diverse set of civic and political organizations to assess styles of citizenship (Bennett, 2008) on civic websites. Bennett, Wells, and Freelon's (2011) study focused on the investigation of youth-focused civic websites, their site traffic, and potential civic learning opportunities embedded in the sites, rather than focusing on the civic experiences of young people themselves. This provided me with the impetus to learn the experiences of young people through empirical research, which would contribute an up-to-date understanding of citizenship and civic engagement that includes the direct experiences of young people in contemporary society. As Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox's (2003) work is most closely related to this aim, I will draw on their work on citizenship throughout this thesis. Citizenship and civic engagement are the two key components of civic identity, which refers to how we share aspects of ourselves with others, and interact with each other and with political leaders. While there is no single agreed-upon definition of civic engagement, in this thesis its definition includes activities that are aimed at improving a community, in both digitally mediated and not digitally mediated ways. These concepts of civic identity and civic engagement

are the core of the theoretical motivation of this study, and will be addressed in depth throughout this thesis.

My own interest in this area of research in civic identity and civic engagement stems primarily from my personal involvement in youth civic organizations, especially the Junior State of America, which is the largest student-run and student-led organization in the United States (Junior State of America Foundation, 2018). Through after school programming, regional conventions, and summer programs for high school students, the Junior State of America fosters the development of leadership skills, civil debate, and civic engagement through volunteer and activism opportunities. My own participation in the Junior State of America summer programs as a secondary school student and, later on, as a tutor, led me to pursue postsecondary studies in government and politics. My curiosity about how the government works and how citizens participate in democracy led me to study civic education, investigating its link to voting behavior, and its prevalence in the missions of charter schools in the United States. Through a variety of research undertakings since 2009, I have been surprised to find that civic education is lacking throughout the United States, and research on the subject is often limited to populations over the age of 18, which is the legal voting age in the United States and in many other democracies.

As I investigated the state of civic education in the United States, technology continued to weave its way into my everyday life, and I began to wonder about the implications of the prevalence of new media and digital technologies in the lives of others around me. I became especially curious about how technology manifested itself in the lives of young people, because of the trends in young people gaining access to technology at younger ages. Such questions have fascinated me, and I sought to learn more about its implications for civic life, from the formation of civic identity, to civic education, and ways that people can engage civically. Understanding that there is no single definition of civic engagement, and no concrete definition of civic identity, led me to pursue this investigation.

As an educator and tutor, I worked closely with young people ages 11 through 18 in public schools, after school programs, and summer programs in the United States. I have always enjoyed interacting with and learning from young people in this life stage,

and from my experiences, I learned that many of the young people I had worked with often desired to be engaged, and were excited to share their experiences and perspectives with those who asked. My collective experiences and interests led me to question the interaction between young people, technology, and civic engagement. I saw a great opportunity to learn whether and how young people felt they could engage in their community and their society through digitally mediated ways, and how I, as the researcher, could become a medium through which young people could share their experiences and perspectives.

## **1.2 Context of the Study**

### **1.2.1 Perceived Disengagement of Young People**

Prior research in this area has focused on the perceived disengagement of young people. For decades, there has been a global debate about youth civic engagement and political participation, painting a mixed picture about whether and how young people are civically engaged. In the United States, explanations for the low turnout rates among young voters stem from research in social capital and political participation. Smith (1999) noted that this trend is correlated with a decline in participation among adolescents in extracurricular activities and volunteer organizations, and Putnam's (2000) work on the decline in social capital echoed this theory. Other scholars speculate that youth are disengaged due to broad social changes like job insecurity and neo-liberal ideology, which have alienated young people from the political process (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010). Scholars also debate whether youth appear less concerned with economic, social, and political issues, due to the perception that the issues do not directly affect them (Galland, 2007), or if it is a myth that youth are self-absorbed and not concerned with public affairs (Youniss & Levine, 2009).

There has been an effort within the academic community to resolve this myth, and the focus on young people's disengagement is most likely due to research on youth engagement focusing on what young people are *not* doing, such as voting with high turnout rates (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2017), and therefore views and portrays them as inactive (Eden & Roker, 2002). Yet, as Youniss and Levine (2009) argue, there must be a shift in thinking to view youth as assets, rather than a population that has problems. When the focus shifts to what young people *are* doing, research demonstrates that

young people are engaged in their communities, but in non-traditional ways (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2005). Young people now have access to open source tools and social networking platforms, which they can use to address political and social issues directly (Benkler, 2006; Coleman, 2008). Young people now turn to more accessible forms of engagement (Delgado & Staples, 2007; Ginwright, 2009), which are often digitally mediated and accepted as non-traditional means of engagement (Henn & Foard, 2012). Rather than waiting until they reach voting age (Earl & Schussman, 2008; Kawashima-Ginsburg, 2011; Soep, 2015; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015), young people find ways to demonstrate that they care about their communities (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Young people sign petitions, interact with elected officials on social media, access information from news alerts on their smartphones, and read blog posts on Tumblr to negotiate others' opinions and develop their own (Barrett & Zani, 2014).

Young people are civically engaged, due in part to the affordances of technologies, as mentioned above, yet there are structures that must be in place within civic education for young people to become civically engaged most effectively. Most commonly, young people learn about means of civic engagement through civic education (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Levinson, 2010), and such an exposure to civic learning has been linked to later civic engagement (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Keating & Janmaat, 2015). In the United States, where the study presented in this thesis takes place, education for democratic citizenship has been embedded in the educational culture of the nation, but has not been a priority in public education for several decades. Most recent reports released by the Center for American Progress indicate that no state currently provides sufficient and comprehensive civic education: only nine states and the District of Columbia require one year of U.S. government or civics, 31 states only require a half-year of civics or U.S. government education, and 10 states have no civics requirement (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). In the states that do have a civics curriculum, the curriculum narrowly focuses on civic knowledge, such the history of the Constitution and Bill of Rights and instruction on state and local voting policies. However, those state curricula often lack experiential learning opportunities or local problem-solving components that would scaffold the skills and sense of agency that young people need for civic engagement (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Civic education precipitates civic engagement, which can yield an increase in efficacy and development of political voice (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010). In contemporary society, technology has many

affordances to amplify voice, which is especially important for young people, who need their voices to be heard to make future contributions to the society that they live in. When they feel they are making a difference by being civically engaged– and receive positive reinforcement for that engagement – they will stay engaged (Bandura, 2008).

Today’s youth have come of age in the time of digital technologies (Xenos & Foot, 2008), and now have a different kind of citizenship from their parents – it has become digitally mediated through blogging, social networking, civic gaming, podcasts, and online petitions (Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010; Gerodimos & Ward, 2007). Young peoples’ high level of engagement with technology has actually demonstrated young people to be more active participants in society. While high engagement with technology does not always equate to high engagement in civic life, the positive association between the two indicates that the myth that young people are completely disengaged ought to be reconsidered: references to youth disengagement are common, but in the digital era youth participation is “active and vibrant” (Xenos & Foot, 2008, p. 54). In their participation, young people have strayed away from traditional news media, and retrieve much of their news information through digital media sources (Hendricks & Frye, 2012; Poindexter, 2012), further emphasizing how daily activities have become digitally mediated in contemporary society.

### **1.2.2 New Forms of Engagement with Technology**

In contemporary society, technology is an integral part of daily life. At present, technology is both a leisure activity – streaming television shows and movies on Netflix is one of young people’s many favorite ways to relax – and is a way for young people to interact with others. It has been widely accepted for decades that social and educational factors influence the development of political identity (Gillman & Sofer, 1978), and today, these social and educational factors are mediated digitally. Social circles are now broadened through the connections made through social media and opinions that are read via online news outlets and alerts on smartphones. The quotidian use of technology and the Internet has influenced factors that contribute to one’s civic identity, including how one shares aspects of the self with others, and interacts with others and with political leaders.

With the present study's focus on civic identity and civic engagement, it is also important to note how technology – especially the Internet – manifests itself in the public sphere. For many, the Internet “is the first port of call for finding information” (Livingstone, 2010, p. 3). People turn to the Internet and social media platforms to access news information, share their views, and encourage other people to act on issues that they support. The Internet can be used to mobilize groups that previously have not often participated in politics (Mesch & Coleman, 2007), and, in theory, social media also brings each user only one step away from political and social leaders, by Tweet or Direct Message, making these leaders appear more accessible and willing to use social media to interact with their constituents.

For example, throughout the 2008 Presidential Election campaign, social media allowed young people to connect and develop interest groups related to Barack Obama and his candidacy. Through those social media communities, people gathered and participated in the electoral process. With the university student-supported Barack Obama groups that were formed on Facebook, Obama became a very visible candidate that appealed to the age group that was using social media. Ultimately, he won the election, and many attribute the victory to the power of the Internet (Watkins, 2009). Furthermore, platforms like Twitter and Facebook afford users the opportunity to compose posts to share their beliefs and positions, and social media is also a place where people learn about what is going on in their communities, schools, and countries. The Internet has also afforded new styles of protest (Castells, 2007), marked recently by the Arab Spring (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014; Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Maziad, 2011) and the Black Lives Matter movement (Carney, 2016). Digital technologies and social networking have provided more opportunities for people to shape their civic identity by interacting with content and people of different political perspectives, giving us the option to go outside of our geographical communities and into the wider world<sup>1</sup>. These digitally mediated interactions shape young people's daily lives, and how they see themselves fitting into and contributing to contemporary society.

While there is a host of literature related to youth engagement in contemporary society, this prior research on has focused on the civic engagement of young voters between the

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<sup>1</sup> Previous research demonstrates that Facebook and similar sites keep us trapped in a bubble of our own worldview (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). This challenge will be explored further in Chapter Two.

ages of 18 and 25 (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Watkins, 2009; Weinstein, 2014; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015; Youniss & Levine, 2009). In some cases, the focus has homed in on the most engaged people within that population (Weinstein, 2014). This aforementioned research has left out the perspectives and experiences of young people before they reach voting age, a time in adolescent development wherein young people are developing their civic identity and understanding the ways in which they want to contribute to their communities. Furthermore, prior research has not investigated how young people understand citizenship – a key personal and reflective component of civic identity. The study presented in this thesis focuses on young people before they reach voting age in an effort understand how people in this life stage think about how they see themselves fitting into and participating in contemporary society. There is much to be learned about civic activities beyond voting, which has been demonstrated by research into the non-traditional means of civic engagement experienced by young people (Earl & Schussman, 2008; Soep, 2015; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015). Focusing on young people between the ages of 14 and 17 will provide a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of young people before they are legally able to participate in their society by voting. Moreover, qualitative investigation into these experiences will explore what young people themselves think about their role in society and the ways in which they can be civically engaged in today's world.

### **1.2.3 Research Questions**

This study aims to understand the civic experiences of young people, ages 14 through 17, growing up in today's digital era to better understand how young people are engaging in contemporary society, because at present, the literature does provide insight into how young people are thinking about citizenship and civic engagement in this digital era. Young people are in a unique stage of development, marked by the development of values and a belief system, and an identity (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). This identity is informed by the experiences and interactions that young people have with others and the world around them. By learning how this age group thinks about how they present themselves to others, their civic identities, and their approaches to engaging in the political world, academics, educators, and policymakers can better understand the tools and skills that young people need in order to develop into

contributing and responsible members of their communities and society. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. *In what ways do young people, ages 14 through 17, present themselves to others in contemporary society?*
2. *What are the mechanisms through which young people form their civic identity in this digital era, and how do young people understand citizenship and civic engagement?*
3. *What are the means through which young people engage in the political world, and what factors contribute to this engagement?*

#### **1.2.4 Methodology Overview**

In-depth interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for data collection for a study investigating such personal topics as identity and civic identity. Furthermore, through in-depth interviews it is possible to discover the individual experiences that shape young people's identity, civic identity, and civic experiences. I am interested in young people and how they interact with the world around them, including interactions with other people and technology. Meaning is constructed through young people's relationships and exchanges with their peers, social media, and their participation in this study; in-depth interviews afford the opportunity to construct meaning with the participants through follow-up questions and inquiry for further details when a participant shares their experiences and views. To best investigate the research questions, I set out to recruit participants for two phases of in-depth interviews, gathering evidence from the experiences and perspectives of the young people themselves.

The young people who participated in this study were selected based on their relevance to the research aim and research questions (Schwandt, 2007). The research was conducted in the United States of America, where civic education has been a longstanding tradition in public education (Journell, 2010), specifically in the state of Massachusetts. Massachusetts was chosen as the sampling location because of my personal connections with school principals, teachers, and after school program leaders in the area to streamline the recruitment process. Participants were selected to maximize

representation in accordance with Massachusetts's state demographic statistics, as an effort to maximize representation and learn from young people from as many of the diverse backgrounds in the state as possible.

The first phase of data was gathered through one-on-one 45- to 60-minute interviews with each of the 46 participants of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, who were recruited from secondary schools and after school programs in the Northeastern United States. Following theoretical saturation, I devised an interview schedule for Phase Two to home in on the key themes that had arisen after Phase One. I employed an iterative data analysis process for this study, beginning with the field notes and transcriptions following each interview for both Phase One and Phase Two, and subsequently coding each transcript before moving into a method of analysis through writing. Chapter Three will describe the research methods in detail.

### **1.2.5 Potential Contributions of the Study**

This study of young people's civic experiences in contemporary society in the United States offers several contributions. This qualitative study provides rich data from youth voices, which inform understanding of how young people form their civic identity in this digital era, and how educators might scaffold young people's civic experiences through civic education that is revitalized for today's digitally mediated world. By studying these experiences of young people using the methods outlined in the previous section, this study contributes to the development of existing literature and research about young people's civic experiences in contemporary society.

To date, a majority of previous research has focused on the deficits of young people, like low youth voter turnout, rather than the non-traditional forms of civic engagement that are possible at all ages, including participating in political demonstrations and blogging about salient political issues (Barrett & Zani, 2014). Prior research has also only scratched the surface of how young people understand and experience citizenship. Additionally, there has been limited research carried out that specifically addresses the civic experiences of young people before they reach voting age, and, consequently, there is a lack of an appropriate framework for understanding these experiences. Prior studies have examined the civic potential of technology (Lenhart, Kahne, Middaugh,

Macgill, Evans, & Vitak, 2008) and the status of civic engagement among young people (Bennett, 2008; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015; Youniss & Yates, 1997; Youniss & Levine, 2009), but have not examined young people's own civic experiences as they come of age in the digital era. Therefore, this study shares young people's unique perspectives on citizenship and civic engagement, and contributes a framework for understanding civic identity in contemporary society. Prior frameworks focus on citizenship, and lack investigation into the digital features of young people's contemporary life (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003) and a deep understanding of the experiences of young people themselves through qualitative inquiry (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011).

### **1.3 Terminology**

This study will focus on young people aged 14 through 17 and how they present themselves to others, and how they conceptualize and experience citizenship and civic engagement, within the context of civic education in the United States, and in an era characterized by technology use. This section will illustrate the use of each of these terminologies for the purpose of the study: *young people*, *identity*, *civic*, *civic identity*, *civic engagement*, *civic education*, and *technology*.

*Young people* is the primary term I will use to discuss the population of individuals aged 14 through 17, about which this study has been conducted. While this term is utilized to describe youth, adolescents, and teenagers in different disciplines, these terms have become a normative way to define this population of people, and may be used interchangeably throughout the thesis (Ito, et al., 2010). Section 2.3 discusses this population in more detail with the relevant literature.

*Identity* is an individual and social experience (boyd, 2007a) of defining oneself "based on our characteristics and attributes and the social context(s) of which we are part" (Davies & Eynon, 2013, p. 60). *Identity* is a process that develops through exposure to other people, ideas, and experiences (Erikson, 1968; Nagel, 1987). Section 2.3 discusses theories of identity and how individuals choose to present their identity to others.

*Civic* refers to activities related to the public sphere and community, including political activities and discourse (Levine, 2016). While there is not a single agreed-upon definition of *civic identity* or *civic engagement*, for the purposes of this study, *civic identity* includes two key components: a personal component and a collective component. The notion of civic identity has been modified for this study from Knefelkamp (2008) and Youniss and Yates (1997):

- 1) a broader sense of how an individual develops and situates oneself and one's beliefs within a broader group of people,
- and -
- 2) how that individual engages with others in the social, political, and economic structures within their society.

Section 2.4 will elaborate on the concept of civic identity.

*Civic engagement* will follow a combination of the following two definitions, which brings together ideas from scholars who incorporate technology into civic engagement, and those who do not. First, the definition of *civic engagement* as “participation in the public sphere through direct experience with online publishing, discourse, debate, co-creation of culture, and collective action” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 102), and second, as “any activity aimed at improving one's community” (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008, p. 162). The justification for these two definitions will be further explained in Chapter Two.

There is a debate in the literature regarding a distinction between *engagement* and *participation*. While civic engagement has been broadly defined, as mentioned above, political participation tends to have a narrow definition focusing on electoral participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). The definition of political participation is slowly beginning to merge with the definition of civic engagement that I use in this thesis, which includes community-centered service and volunteer work (Ekman & Amnå, 2012), and can also include participation in formal political institutions through voting in participatory budgeting, for example. This definition has also expanded to include digitally mediated activities, including campaigning online, political groups organized on social media, and petitions that circulate through the Internet (Van Deth, 2016).

Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths (2018) distinguish between political engagement and political participation, and argue that political engagement is an exploratory phase of a person's political life, whereas political participation requires commitment to a political action, such as voting. Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths (2018) define political engagement as "having interest in, paying attention to, having knowledge or opinions about, being conscious of, proactive about and constantly informed about politics" (p. 13). In this thesis, I focus on *civic engagement* that includes both political and non-political activities. The term *civic participation* is used interchangeably with *civic engagement*, as in other studies that informed the study presented in this thesis (Hart & Kirshner, 2009; Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010; Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007; Vilchis, Scott, & Besaw, 2015). *Political participation* in particular is a *means* of civic engagement, as it has emerged in the findings presented in Chapter Five. In this study, civic engagement refers to all facets of civic life and improving one's community, through both political and non-political means. As discussed above, there is no widely agreed upon definition of "civic" among scholars, but the term commonly refers to public life. The definitions of civic engagement that I draw upon in this study reflect all activities aimed at improving one's community, digitally mediated and otherwise, and will be further justified in Chapter Two. Further research is necessary to explore the possible distinction between engagement and participation.

*Civic education* refers to how young people are educated to become citizens of a democratic society. The goal of civic education is to "develop competent citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to participate responsibly and effectively in the political and civic life of a democracy" (Patrick, 2003, p. 2). Civic education is also an opportunity to teach critical thinking, social analysis, and skills of deliberation (Westheimer, 2004). Formal education plays a significant role in the formation of civic ideals, and is considered the predominant indicator of political activity among individuals (Journell, 2010). Today, education is an important way in which individuals can fulfill the "ideals of citizenship," which Reuben (2005) defines as "communicating and debating changing values, translating ideas into expectations for behavior, and expressing beliefs in institutional forms" (p. 21).

Neil Selwyn (2016) defines *technology* as “how humans modify nature to meet their needs and wants... to improve existing forms of living” (p. 6). By Selwyn’s (2016) definition, technology refers to more than machinery and tools, and can also include the human knowledge that surrounds the activities that utilize these machinery and tools (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1985). In contemporary society, it is this understanding of technology as more than material artifacts that makes it possible to include the digital modifications humans have made to their everyday life, such as the Internet (Wessels, 2010), within the definition.

In this study, *technology* is “anything that you can do digitally... on a smartphone, computer, laptop, tablet, game console” (Davies & Eynon, 2013, p. 2). The definition of social media in this study will follow danah boyd’s (2014) definition: “sites and services that emerged in the early 2000s, including social networking, blogging, and related sites that included tools for user created content” (p. 6). Digital spaces like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Snapchat will be considered social media for the purposes of this study (Mihailidis, 2014). Chapter Two will elaborate upon the backgrounds and uses of these social media, as they are the most frequently used sites among the participants in this study. Throughout the thesis, I argue that as people interact with technology in many ways in daily life, the digital world is an extension of that daily life. In other words, daily life is often mediated by the digital, and henceforth I will discuss activities and interactions being “digitally mediated.” Other scholars argue that there is a difference between and a debate about what constitutes the online and offline worlds, particularly related to civic engagement activities, which will be addressed in Section 2.4.2.

The range of activities and processes represented by *technology* and the *digital* in this thesis are those experienced by the participants in this study. These activities include activities that can be done using a computer, tablet, and smartphone (in most instances), and normally include access to the Internet. Participants in this study discussed using technology to: communicate with their friends (i.e., sending text messages or commenting on social media posts), organize school groups (i.e., posting a notice about dance team try-outs on the school Facebook page), access the news (i.e, having notifications to Twitter turned on, receiving email news digests from online newspapers, watching television news at home), set reminders (i.e., setting an alarm on a smartphone

to wake up in the morning, or have an automated reminder to take out the trash on a certain day of the week), complete homework (i.e., using Google Classroom to access school assignments), play video games (i.e., participating in multi player games using a PlayStation console), and stream movies and television programs (i.e., using Netflix and Hulu to catch up on their favorite series), among others.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

Following the Introduction, the thesis begins with a critical review of literature in Chapter Two to better situate this study. Chapter Two begins with literature that highlights the digitally mediated nature of society, particularly civic applications of technology. The literature then turns to focus on conceptualizations of young people from the psychological perspective of Erikson (2005) and sociological perspectives of Goffman (1959; 1978) and Schlenker (1986; 2012). These perspectives inform the theory of presentation of the self, the theory of identity that guides this study of young people in today's world.

To introduce the concept of civic identity, Chapter Two details how citizenship and civic engagement have previously been defined, especially through landmark research on young people's conceptualizations of citizenship by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003; 2005). Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox's (2003; 2005) work resulted in a framework for understanding how young people conceptualize citizenship, a personal, reflective component of civic identity, which later informs the findings presented in this thesis in Chapter Five. Chapter Two also discusses the ways in which civic engagement activities have been digitally mediated in the digital era, which marks a time at which focus has turned to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. Civic education is an important factor in later civic engagement, but has faced a decline around the world and especially in the United States, where a strong tradition for education for democratic citizenship has prevailed, yet in recent years has failed to be incorporated into formal curriculum. The literature review positions the study to investigate the ways in which the digital era and the civic sphere intersect for young people ages 14 through 17. Chapter Two reveals the need for a reinvigoration of civic education, informed by a more appropriate framework of civic identity to understand the experiences of young people in today's world.

Chapter Three will describe the methods used in this study, first detailing the research aims and questions, then describing the methodological approach for this study. In-depth interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for data collection for this study. Forty-six participants of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds were recruited from secondary schools and after school programs in the Northeastern United States for two phases of in-depth interviews. The first phase of data was gathered through one-on-one 45- to 60-minute interviews with each of the 46 participants. I revised and added new questions in the interview protocol between each interview, so that the interview that followed would be informed by the experience of the previous interview (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Following theoretical saturation wherein no additional data was found, I devised an interview schedule for Phase Two to home in on the key themes that were revealed through Phase One (see Appendix C for Phase Two Interview Schedule). I customized the interview questions for each participant in Phase Two to include participants' own definitions for topics such as community and active citizenship. Overall, I selected participants for Phase Two interviews based on the level of insight they shared regarding civic identity formation, the underlying theme of the second research question. This sample of students included young people with varying degrees of interest in politics and varying degrees of social media use. I utilized an iterative data analysis process, first writing field notes and transcriptions of the audio recordings following each interview for both Phase One and Phase Two, and later coding all transcripts before transitioning into a method of analysis through writing vignettes that illustrate the civic experiences of a selection of participants.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six will present findings that address the research questions for this study, first focusing on identity formation among young people, then moving toward civic identity as experienced by young people in contemporary society. Chapter Four will address the first research question, *In what ways do young people, ages 14 through 17, present themselves to others in contemporary society?* We must first appreciate young people's identity, as determined by their self-presentation, in Chapter Four. Presentation of the self is an even more difficult task for young people of color. This chapter highlights how identity and presentation of the self can be understood in

contemporary society, providing a foundation for how young people might present themselves as citizens or members of society as well. The case of Martin, a young black male, helps to highlight how young people struggle with their presentation of self in today's digital era.

Chapter Five will address the second research question, *What are the mechanisms through which young people form their civic identity in contemporary society? How do young people understand citizenship, and civic engagement?* Civic identity refers to the broader sense of developing and situating oneself and one's beliefs within a group of people, and how one engages with others in the social, political, and economic structures within their society. Conceptualizations of what it means to be a citizen and what it means to be civically engaged shape political and civic beliefs and what civic engagement looks like for young people. The data revealed that technology informs and shapes the *experiences* that young people have related to citizenship and civic engagement, but young people still hold traditional views of citizenship and civic engagement, despite this influence.

Chapter Six will address the final research question, *What are the means through which young people engage in the political world, and what factors contribute to this engagement?* This chapter will illustrate civic identity in practice by describing how young people are engaging in and shaping their views of today's political world in digitally mediated ways. Technology is embedded within each of these areas and themes, and adds nuance to how young people present themselves and gather information about the world around them, and how they see themselves engaging politically. The data demonstrate that young people feel their voices and efficacy are restricted, despite their digitally mediated civic experiences.

Chapters Seven and Eight will conclude the thesis. Chapter Seven will discuss the implications of the findings presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Chapter Seven will revisit the research questions presented in Chapter One, and explain how the civic habits and experiences of young people are connected to their digitally mediated lives in contemporary society. Chapter Seven will also introduce the theoretical and educational contributions of the study, which include a new framework of civic identity in contemporary society, and recommendations for a reinvigoration of civic education to

foster a greater sense of efficacy among young people. Chapter Eight will conclude the thesis and suggest avenues for future research.

## Chapter Two | Literature Review

# Where Technology, Youth, & Civics Meet: A Springboard for Understanding Civic Identity

### 2.1 Overview

Buckingham (2000) observed that young people have been excluded from politics “on the basis of arguments about their essential inadequacies,” (p. 169) like maturity and political knowledge. Such perceptions about young people have pervaded public discourse for years, but a growing body of research now recognizes that young people are civically engaged before they reach voting age (Earl & Schussman, 2008; Kawashima-Ginsburg, 2011; Soep, 2015; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015), and they are therefore engaged in non-traditional ways (Henn & Foard, 2012). Young people care about their communities and society at large, but feel their voices are not heard (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006).

The Internet has become embedded in daily life (Bakardjieva, 2005) and prior research demonstrates that young people use technology in myriad ways, and use the Internet more than older people do (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2011; Kim, Russo, & Amnå, 2017). The Internet has provided a new medium for young people to express themselves and interact with others about issues of personal and public concern, including political and social issues. While scholars have investigated this civic potential of technology through quantitative methods (Lenhart, Kahne, Middaugh, Macgill, Evans, & Vitak, 2008), there is a need to qualitatively examine the civic experiences of adolescents with the belief that young people are capable of making decisions and informing themselves about issues of public concern, and that they may do so in digitally mediated ways.

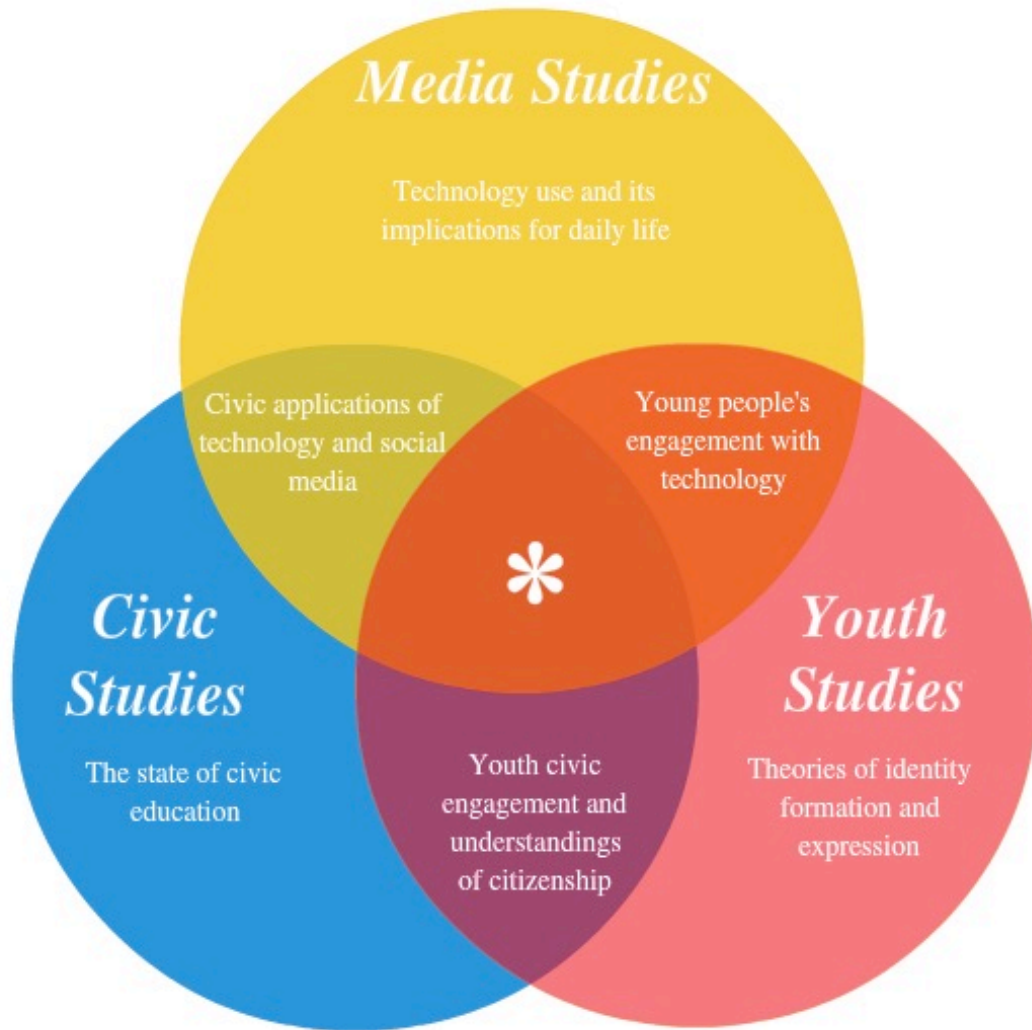
Young people are in a unique life stage in which they are discovering who they are, and who they wish to be (Erikson, 1968) through their interactions with others (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 2012). This life stage is marked by the development of a sense of self and a system of values and beliefs (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010), which makes this a critical period to investigate young people's civic identity, which is developed through internal and societal factors (Haste, 2004), including education.

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) conducted several studies of civic education around the world (1999; 2009) to measure and compare the status of curriculum and civic knowledge for students in Year 9. While the 1990s saw a growing interest throughout the world in developing civic education curriculum, the education tradition of the United States was founded on the belief that education should prepare young people for their role as citizens in a democracy. Civic education has been a longstanding tradition in the United States, compared to other nations, such as the United Kingdom, where formal civic education came later, after the Crick Report (1998; McLaughlin, 2000).

Throughout the past two and a half centuries since the founding of the United States, this tradition of civic education has prevailed. Marquette and Mineshima (2002) detail significant developments in United States civic education throughout history, starting with the Founding Fathers of the United States, including George Washington, John Adams, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and Alexander Hamilton, who believed in a free public education for all, such that all members of society would be educated for participation in their new democracy. During nineteenth century, waves of immigration from Europe provided educators with the opportunity to embrace acculturation. Such attitudes toward enriching young people's understanding of other cultures gradually made its way into history curriculum, which also included lessons on the government institutions of the United States. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, John Dewey (1916) made significant contributions to civic education, and saw young people not just as future participants in political activity, such as voting, but as young members of society, who must be taught how to think critically to engage in society. In the 1980s, the United States public education system adopted the term "social studies" for a new school subject that would encompass history, civics, geography, economics, and political science. The United States developed national standards for civic education curriculum,

but the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report card demonstrated that “levels of civic knowledge in U.S. have remained unchanged or even declined over the past century” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

This thesis takes a holistic approach to the literature, because the study addresses the gap within the literature where media studies, youth studies, and civic studies intersect, as depicted by the asterisk in Figure 1 below. These fields have made some contributions to the understanding of young people’s experiences in contemporary society, including: technology use in daily life, young people’s engagement with technology, theories of identity formation and expression, youth civic engagement habits and models of citizenship, the state of civic education, and civic applications of technology. However, there is a gap in the literature where all of these areas intersect: young people’s civic identity in contemporary society. The study presented in this thesis will illustrate how the themes outlined in the following sections intersect to inform our understanding of what young people experience in their civic lives in contemporary society, and will address how this study fills the gaps in the literature in these three areas.



**Figure 1: The Present Study's Position in the Literature and Potential Contributions.** This study addresses the gap in the literature around youth civic identity, and is situated where media studies, youth studies, and civic studies intersect, marked by the asterisk in this figure.

The literature review will address these key areas in each field that contribute to an understanding of the unique present era in which young people are finding themselves as they mature toward adulthood. The literature review highlights previous research that is most applicable to the research questions that will be presented in Chapter Three. This study aims to build upon this previous research to understand how young people are forming their civic identity, and how they are engaging in the political world in digitally mediated ways. To situate the study in the contemporary digital era, Section 2.2 highlights research in civic applications of technology. Section 2.3 reviews the psychological and sociological theories of young people's identity formation, and underlines how these two theories intersect to provide a better understanding of youth

identity presentation in contemporary society. Section 2.4 presents previous research on citizenship and civic engagement, and develops an understanding of civic identity in this digital era. Section 2.5 addresses the shift away from civic education in United States curriculum and its implications for young people's civic experiences. Section 2.6 summarizes the gaps in the literature and reiterates the motivation for this study.

## **2.2 Contemporary Society: An Era Marked by Technology**

To understand young people in today's world, it is necessary to explore the features that define the contemporary time. We live in an era in which technology can reach us anytime, any place, at a very fast pace (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2006). Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have pervaded society (Castells, 1996) for over forty years. Today, technologies most commonly used are laptops, personal computers (PCs), smartphones, tablets, and video game consoles. The vast majority of Americans – 95 per cent – use mobile phones, and 77 per cent of Americans own smartphones, up from just 35 per cent in 2011 (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Not only does technology intersect with activities in our everyday life (Livingstone, 2010), but technology has become *embedded* in daily life (Bakardjieva, 2005), from the moment we wake up to the alarm that rings from our smartphones, to the news alerts that flash across our computer and phone screens, to the messaging services we use to communicate with others. Throughout the thesis, I argue that as people interact with technology in many ways in daily life, the digital mediates our interactions and experiences of daily life. Other scholars argue that there is a difference between and a debate about what constitutes the online and offline worlds, particularly related to civic engagement activities, which will be addressed in Section 2.4.2.

Cultural norms are shifting as a result of technology's pervasiveness in much of the developed world's culture: it is acceptable to be constantly connected, and for many, it is the norm (Turkle, 2011). Technology will be discussed throughout this thesis and refers to "anything that you can do digitally... on a smartphone, computer, laptop, tablet, game console" (Davies & Eynon, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, the technology that features in contemporary society primarily refers to digital devices, such as

smartphones, that can connect people to the Internet, which is “pervasively incorporated” into our everyday life (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002, p. 7).

### **2.2.1 The Internet and Social Media: An Overview**

The Internet is “a communications facility designed to connect computers together so that they can exchange digital information” (Clark, 2004). Often, the Internet is used synonymously with the World Wide Web, which is the part of the Internet that people most often access. The World Wide Web is an application supported by the Internet, and contains web pages marked by URLs (Universal Resource Locators), which form the basis of hyperlinks from one Web page to another (Clark, 2004). Haste (2010) finds that the Internet affords opportunities for individuals to assess, modify, and disseminate information. Moreover, the Internet is a place where people can talk, exchange ideas, and form communities (Turkle, 1995).

Technology, especially the Internet, can provide the means to bring together individuals into groups (Servaes, 2003). One such technology is social networking websites, which is one of the common and mainstream uses of technology by young people (Davies & Eynon, 2013). Social networking developed out of the human need to connect and relate to others, and enables interactivity by removing barriers between the public and private spheres of communication (Fenton, 2012). Social networking websites emerged in the early 2000s, and include blogging websites as well as related websites that include tools for user-created content (boyd, 2014). On social networking websites, individuals can create a public or semi-public profile, make visible their social networks, and view the connections that others have (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Many social networking websites have moved beyond the webpage platform to applications, or “apps,” which are software programs designed for mobile devices like smartphones and tablets (Gardner & Davis, 2013). Apps allow people to be connected to their social media without the constraint of being connected to a computer with a web browser, and allow people to share aspects of their lives every moment of the day. Apps can be a gateway to social networking sites and tools: for example, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr are all social networking websites, but can be accessed through an app as well. Collectively, social media are “new media that enable social interaction between

participants, often through the sharing of media” (Ito, et al., 2010, p. 28), and include social networking websites, collaborative spaces, and apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Snapchat (Mihailidis, 2014). These websites and their corresponding apps are designed in such a way that encourages users to experiment with their self-expression (Gardner & Davis, 2013), a theme that will be further explored in Chapter Four.

Several popular social networking websites that feature as apps and are commonly used by young people include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Snapchat. While social media is not a “one size fits all” model, young people tend to use each social media site for a different purpose (boyd, 2014; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015). Appendix D outlines the key features and affordances of each of these aforementioned social media. Appendix D also highlights the potential implications of these apps for civic identity formation, which are briefly outlined below.

Facebook has a unique “Events” feature, which allows users to create events, or find out about events happening in their area that they might be interested in. Young people may learn about protests (i.e., a school walkout) through a Facebook Event. Twitter’s re-Tweet feature “empowers a user to spread information of their choice beyond the reach of the original Tweet’s Followers” (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). This allows the dissemination of information beyond the intended audience, broadening the reach of individual voices. Moreover, Twitter (theoretically) allows users to directly connect to anyone with an account, from their best friend to the President of the United States. Twitter news alerts on smartphones and tablets keep young people informed about political affairs and current events at the international, national, and local level.

Tumblr users can customize their blogs with various fonts, colors, layouts, and usernames. Unlike Facebook, Tumblr allows for people to explore with their username and maintain an anonymous identity if they wish. Some users may use this anonymity to explore their political opinions and beliefs that they might not feel comfortable sharing with their friends and family, and others who know them. While anonymity in content sharing is sought on Tumblr, a more public platform is sought on Instagram. Social media blurs the lines between producer and consumer, allowing for people to become active participants and content creators in digital spaces, rather than passive recipients

(Gosa, 2012). One of the most well-known content creation apps is Instagram, which focuses on user-produced photography. Often, young people take to Instagram to post selfies<sup>2</sup> and share photos from their daily lives. Young people can take to Instagram to share a selfie with a caption indicating a political message (i.e., “Black Lives Matter”), and can learn about current events by Following politicians’ and news outlets’ Instagram pages.

The key feature of Snapchat that distinguishes it from the rest is that the photos or videos that are shared in individual messages disappear after the recipient views the message. This feature is most appealing to young people who wish to ensure privacy of their conversations with their peers: parents or teachers cannot read the message once the recipient has opened it. Young people can use Snapchat as a medium to communicate with their friends about current events.

### ***Diversity of Young People’s Engagement with Technology***

Public discourse has assumed generational thinking, the idea that people born after a certain date have different experiences from other age groups (Hoover, 2009), and misrepresented young people of this digital era by referring to them collectively as digital natives (Bayne & Ross, 2011). Although evidence points to great numbers of young people engaging with technology, we cannot assume that all young people are a homogenous group with access to technology, and that all young people possess the know-how to and interest in using technology, even if the pervasive discourse suggests otherwise (Selwyn, 2003). While technology is present in daily life, its presence alone does not mean it is a part of every young person’s daily life, or that it is a part of daily life in the same ways for each person. Young people differ in their levels of interest, motivation, and skills for technology use that might have others label them as “digital natives,” suggesting variation among young people’s digital experiences (White & Le Cornu, 2011). Even with Watkins’s (2009) consideration that many young people are constantly connected to the world through their digital devices and social media, it is misleading to think that all young people use technology all of the time and that all young people have been transformed by their experiences with technology (Davies & Eynon, 2013). In fact, certain factors (i.e., socioeconomic status) influence whether

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<sup>2</sup> Selfie is defined by Oxford Dictionaries as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media” (Oxford University Press, 2018).

young people have access to technology at all, and whether they use technology in similar ways (Middaugh & Kirshner, 2015).

While the digital divide may be shrinking over time, it still exists (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002; Gosa, 2012). With technology, young people of all socioeconomic backgrounds could become connected to the wider world and “experiences and opportunities beyond their immediate environments” (Gardner & Davis, 2013, p. 89). However, certain groups experience limited access to technology and the aforementioned experiences, emphasizing the digital divide: limited access groups are predominantly from low socioeconomic strata, and tend to seek alternative access to the Internet, such as using school or library computers, or going to internet cafés (Davies & Eynon, 2013; Kent & Facer, 2004). The lack of access to information and communication technologies prohibits young people from these lower socioeconomic strata from directly experimenting with the technology in ways that would benefit them (Davies & Eynon, 2013). This disparity in access to quality Internet connection and technology was at first one of the only factors of the digital divide (Goode, 2010). In time, digital divide has moved from a simplistic definition of who does and does not have access, towards a more complex definition that explores inequalities in skills, usage, and engagement (Loader, 2007; van Dijk & Hacker, 2003). The digital divide has implications on using the Internet for civic engagement: advantaged groups that already dominated the political participation arena before the advent of the Internet still use the Internet for political participation more than other populations (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010). However, despite the acknowledgement that the digital divide exists, even people who do not use the Internet themselves benefit indirectly from message exchanges between friends, international communication between family members, web searches for shopping information or information about how the world works (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002). In this study, it is important to acknowledge that technology may play a role in the civic experiences of some young people but not others, for all of the reasons listed above. While the contemporary time is marked by digitally mediated life, that is not the case for every young person.

While the majority of young people have used technology as a part of their daily lives, such use has been viewed both positively and negatively: it can “create new forms of community and civic life” and offer resources for “empowerment,” but it can also lead

to privacy concerns and commercial exploitation (Buckingham, 2013, p. 31). Moreover, young people do not take up these opportunities equally (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). While there are indeed risks and concerns associated with technology and internet use, this thesis takes a critical perspective on the generally positive applications of technology, especially its civic applications, which are promising resources for young people who have not yet reached voting age, and will be outlined in the following section.

### **2.2.2 Civic Applications of Technology**

The digital world we live in informs our presentations of our selves and our interactions with others. In this sense, the Internet has the potential to “increase social capital, civic engagement, and develop a sense of belonging to a community” (Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton, 2002, p. 319). Social media offers young people new ways to share and learn about political ideas, raise funds, mobilize others to protest, vote, and make progress on public issues (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014). This section will illustrate the ways in which people use social media to consume and share information about themselves and the world around them and actively share their personal beliefs and experiences.

Exposure to diverse perspectives is key to democratic society (Hodgin, 2016; Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, & Feezell, 2012), and can help young people develop their perspective-taking skills. The ability to understand different perspectives is important, as experience with diversity can give young people exposure to people with perspectives different from their own (Serriere, 2014). Perspective taking (Selman, 1971) plays into civic behavior: if it is possible to put oneself in another’s shoes, one can better advocate for that other person (Tynes & Monterosa, 2015). Literature points to the Internet and social media as mechanisms through which people are connected to each other and exposed to a diversity of cultures, information, and ideas (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014). In such interactions, individuals may reassess their own opinion upon discovering that the other person’s opinion differs from theirs (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). The Internet and social media have the potential to provide opportunities for young people to learn about issues, access news information, share their point of view and learn those of others, and take action for change (Tapscott, 1998; Hodgin, 2016). This study will

demonstrate the links between technology and identity presentation further in Chapter Four.

Individuals can learn from their peers in their immediate social circles through the posts and news headlines they share on their profiles, but people can also gain exposure to others with whom they previously might have had little contact. Technology is blurring traditional social and institutional hierarchies (Friedman, 2005), which is evident in contemporary society as people connect to public officials on Twitter and other platforms. For example, politicians are harnessing the power of social media, with 80 per cent of members of U.S. Congress having their own YouTube channels to interact with their constituents (NPR, 2009). Social media has become a way for candidates for political office to connect with their constituents (Hendricks & Frye, 2012). Even individuals running for public office at the local level run campaign websites, which enable people to learn about the candidate's platform, make campaign donations, and engage in web-based political actions (Xenos & Foot, 2008).

But, while social networking sites were thought to bring about a platform for dialogue and exposure to differing political ideas, in some cases it has been easier for individuals to find and connect with other like-minded individuals and groups, thereby enhancing an individual's own political opinions (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; Fenton, 2012). Young people have embraced technology to connect with people whose values and interests they share (Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011), and because of this, technology can also constrain people from exposure to diverse perspectives (Kahne, Ullman, & Middaugh, 2011). Social media connects people through friend networks, which are notable influences on political opinions. Research on voting behavior and social media use indicates that Facebook messages between friends in the 2010 midterm elections in the United States influenced users' political self-expression and real-world voting (Bond, et al., 2012). In some cases, friend networks are the most important factor limiting the cross-cutting content individuals are exposed to, and when there is friend overlap within social networks, many within those networks hear and read the same opinions (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; boyd, 2008). Moreover, social media is not vetted by any authority, which is both positive – because that allows anyone, including young people, to post content – and negative, because misinformation can also be spread (Middaugh & Kirshner, 2015).

The link between news consumption and civic engagement is well documented in political communications research (McLeod, et al., 1996; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Prior, 2007). Young people have a different relationship to news information than previous generations (Buckingham, 2002). In the digital era, young people are reliant on social media for communication as well as gathering news information (Hendricks & Frye, 2012; Poindexter, 2012), and share and consume media that are individually relevant to them (Linton, 2015). The use of social media is positively associated with promoting material related to and sharing opinions about issues of public concern, and encouraging others to vote or take action on an issue (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). The Internet – especially social media and news outlets with social media accounts or websites – is often a primary source of information about issues of public concern. Today, many young people turn to Facebook, Twitter, and alerts from news apps on their smartphones in order to access their news information, and learn about issues that might be of concern to them.

Young people synthesize the information that surrounds them on television, the Internet, and on news alert apps, and as they form their beliefs and opinions, young people may be compelled to engage in political discussions, which can motivate them to both learn more and act (Middaugh, 2016). When it comes time to share opinions of their own, technology and digital media “enable young people to have political voice and influence without being 18, having money, or even being a citizen” (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014). Social media can serve as a platform for posting one’s personal thoughts and opinions, and such a platform can even be seen as a “bullhorn” that lets them reach many more people (boyd, 2008, p. 114). Young people can also re-Tweet or re-post articles from news outlets that they engage with digitally as a way to illustrate or amplify their opinion on a given issue (Garcia & Middaugh, 2015). Furthermore, young people can share their voice by signing a petition on the Internet, an action that has increased because of the low cost to creating and signing them (Earl & Kimport, 2009; Earl, Kimport, Prieto, Rush, & Reynoso, 2010). These petitions can be linked and shared to social media profiles to exponentially increase the number of people who view – and sign – the petition.

Many young people are constantly connected to each other and to the wider world through the technologies of the digital era. As this section highlighted, the Internet and

social media afford new opportunities for young people to be connected to others, and to learn about issues of public concern. There remains, however, a gap in the literature investigating young people's use of technology and social media for civic engagement *before* they reach voting age. It is critical to examine this because young people between ages 14 and 17 are in an important life stage wherein they are developing their own beliefs – which may very well be informed by the opinions and news information that they read through the digital sources that are accessible to them. Learning about the experiences of young people aged 14 – 17 is critical to helping academics and educators to understand how young people in this life stage interact with technology, each other, and their communities. Understanding this bigger picture is made possible by first understanding how young people are connecting themselves to the wider world through their presentations of self, the way that identity is most often expressed.

### **2.3 Conceptualizations of Young People**

Young people, particularly teenagers, are the most frequent users of the Internet (boyd, 2007b; Ito, et al., 2010; Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker, 2015; Xenos & Foot, 2008), and are established users of technology for civic purposes, as described in the previous section. Despite this knowledge, as the previous section addressed, young people are not often studied before they reach voting age: instead, most research examining “young people” focuses on young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years old (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Watkins, 2009; Weinstein, 2014; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015; Youniss & Levine, 2009). This ignores an entire population of people from study, and leaves a gap in understanding of this particular age group's relationship to technology and the world around them. This section aims to elaborate on the conceptualizations of young people, and describe the theories of identity most applicable in contemporary society to better understand the experiences of this particular group of people. This section will illustrate the terminology applied to people in this age group, and describe the relevant psychological and sociological theories of identity, which will help to address the first research question when the findings are presented in Chapter Four. An understanding of this life stage will inform the knowledge we have about how this age group use social media, and, potentially, whether young people embrace its civic applications.

First, it is necessary to address that the terminology applied to people in this age group – adolescents, youth, and young people – are all terms that originate in psychology and sociology. When considering this age group, scholars, journalists, and parents often group them together as “adolescents” or “teenagers.” It must be remembered, however, that such terms are a socially constructed identity we put on these people (Holloway & Valentine, 2003). We make these distinctions as a way to help ourselves understand the life stage in which these individuals are situated, a stage marked by transformations in and development of a unique identity. In order to fully appreciate this life stage, it is necessary to look at both the psychological and sociological perspectives that apply to this population, and their identity formation – as understood by presentations of the self – which will help us to know how young people see themselves fitting into the world, and their place in it as citizens.

Psychologists use the term “adolescents,” to describe people in this life stage, while sociologists utilize the terms “young people” or “youth.” I utilize these terms to refer to the same group of people, but in previous studies on youth in the civic sphere involve young people ages 18 through 25 years old<sup>3</sup>. Adolescence is a transition phase between childhood and adulthood, with no clear start and end (Muuss, 1996). Most significantly, adolescence is a critical period in which individuals experiment with and seek to find an identity, and when youth begin to think about their future lives as adults (Erikson, 1968; Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Identity is a process that develops through exposure to other people, ideas, and experiences (Erikson, 1968; Nagel, 1987). I view identity as Davies and Eynon (2013) have defined it: the individual and social experience of “how we define ourselves, based on our characteristics and attributes and the social context(s) of which we are part” (p. 60). This notion that identity is both a psychological and social process (boyd, 2007a) is important, because it reflects the experiences of young people today, who often combat stereotypes, such as being individuals who have “identity crises” because “they are not cognitively developed; they are not sufficiently individuated; and they all act alike” (Lesko, 1996, p. 466). Adolescents are often stuck in a socially constructed definition and connotation of their age group (Holloway & Valentine, 2003), as age grounds many social practices, such as voting (Lesko, 1996).

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<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of research on youth civic engagement to date has focused on people who have reached adulthood, between 18 and 25 years of age. Similarly, many studies investigating social media use also focus on the 18-25 or 18-29 year old population because they are the heaviest users of social media (Yamamoto, Kushin, Dalisay 2013).

Adolescents struggle for autonomy and independence in this life stage (Muuss, 1996), which is made more difficult as they are reduced to the aforementioned stereotypes by adults in their lives, and lack autonomy and independence.

When young people reach age 18, they are often perceived as independent. This is because 18 years old is the perceived age of maturation: in the field of human development, the age of 18 is the accepted point in the human life as the cut-off point between adolescence and adulthood. By the age of 18, adolescents have achieved biological maturation, but not social maturation in the level of typical adults (Berk, 2009). During adolescence, young people develop the underlying qualities for political participation, including communication, perspective taking, and development of political attitudes (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). The age of 18 is also the accepted point in most democratic cultures where young people are granted full legal rights for political participation (Finlay, Wray-Lake, & Flanagan, 2010; Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008). Young people under the age of 18 are experiencing a critical period in life: they are not yet legally recognized as adults with the right to vote, but they are mature enough to cognitively and emotionally conceptualize what it means to be a member of a community, hold values and beliefs, and form an identity of their own. With this knowledge, it is paramount to understand the transitions and shifts in identity that occur throughout adolescence to better understand how young people may reach this point in their civic identity.

To understand the population in question, it is first necessary to review theories of identity from both psychological and sociological perspectives. Many studies of adolescents rely on Erik Erikson's (1968) theory of identity (Arnett, 2004; Berzonsky, 2003; Davis, 2010; Davis & Weinstein, 2017; Markus & Nurius, 1986; McAdams, 1996). However, when investigating young people's civic identity in contemporary society, it has become clear that there are sociological factors at play, best presented by the work of Erving Goffman (1959; 1978) and Barry Schlenker (1986). It is necessary to view the identity formation process through both psychological and sociological perspectives simultaneously because this psychological and sociological interaction is precisely what young people themselves are experiencing in nuanced and digitally mediated ways in contemporary society. Psychologically, young people are deciding who they are, but then sociologically they are connecting to others using technology,

and social media in particular, to try out these different identities and situate themselves within society.

### **2.3.1 Psychological Construction of Identity**

When examining psychological influences on identity, Erik Erikson's (1968) theory is the most applicable. During adolescence, an individual has the "prerequisites in physiological growth, mental maturation, and social responsibility" (p. 91) to experience and pass through an identity crisis, the key stage in Erikson's (1968) identity theory. This stage refers to the point at which individuals are preoccupied with managing others' impressions of them, compared with who they feel they are internally (Erikson, 1968). In Erikson's (1968) view, identity formation is a process that lasts a lifetime, but it is most central to the development of adolescents. Adolescents struggle between identity synthesis and identity confusion, a state referred to as a psychosocial moratorium. It is during this time that adolescents try on different identities (Erikson, 1968), and it is the point at which young people are developing their civic identity as well.

There are other models of identity, such as James Marcia's (1980) identity status model, which proposes four identity statuses that are reached throughout adolescent development: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. The statuses are not stages, and do not have to be experienced in order. In the identity diffusion status, there is no indication that the person is trying to commit to an identity, or that the person is aware of the choices one can make when developing an identity. In the identity foreclosure status, an adolescent commits to goals or beliefs that would influence the identity of a future self, and is often influenced by others. The moratorium status is marked by an adolescent's search for alternative identities before settling on one. The identity achievement status follows Erikson's (1968) identity crisis, and is present after an adolescent has committed to an identity involving an ideology and social roles. The challenge with Marcia's (1980) model is that it does not fully apply to the social contexts young people now experience in contemporary society, where the digital has come into play. Ultimately, Erikson's (1968) theory was most applicable to this study, as this theory of identity development informed psychologists and human development scholars throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including James Youniss

and Miranda Yates's (1997) landmark study on civic engagement, which grounds the literature on civic identity and engagement.

In this thesis I draw on the work of Erikson (1968) to argue that young people are in a unique life stage wherein the development of identity is central to how they present themselves to and interact with others and their communities. Erikson's (1968) point that different circumstances and settings require individuals to display different aspects of the self is especially useful to this study as it allows me to think through what young people are experiencing psychologically as they are engaging in society, developing their civic identity and political views, and potentially sharing those views with others. To this end, Erikson's (1968) conceptualization of identity is generative for grasping how young people are forming their identity in contemporary society, when portrayals of identity often take place in digitally mediated ways. It is here also that Erikson's (1968) attention to adolescence as turning point in life in which identity is developed is of value for informing why it is critical to examine this age group and their civic experiences, which are often not investigated until after young people reach voting age.

Other scholars investigating young people in contemporary society also turn to Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development, and apply it to the world we live in today. Recently, Davis and Weinstein (2017) found through their qualitative research with young adults that attitudes and beliefs change over time as one matures, and that one might call into question the identity that they present to others, resulting in the removal of old posts from one's social media accounts that one no longer feels represented the present identity. This notion of thinking about what to present to others builds upon social interaction theory, which will be addressed in the following section.

### **2.3.2 Sociological Construction of Identity**

Scholars agree that identity is a function of both internal and social factors (Côté & Levine, 2002; Davies & Eynon, 2013; Deutsch, 2005; Livingstone, 2009). Young people take aspects of their environment (Hasebrink & Paus-Hasebrink, 2007), social relationships, and interactions with others to construct their identities (Côté & Levine, 2002; Flanagan, 2013). Erikson (1968) noted that technological developments impact identities; today, digital technologies afford adolescents additional opportunities to play

with, explore, and share different aspects of themselves with different audiences (Turkle, 2011). To this point, it is possible that young people may portray different identities or aspects of themselves on different social media sites (Ito, et al., 2010) as a way to maneuver through various social contexts and conversations and acting accordingly (boyd, 2014). Identity is both digitally and socially mediated in contemporary society, which highlights the need to explore the social theories of identity.

Social theories of identity make explicit the self-characterizations that individuals make of themselves as a part of a group and based on their own individual behaviors (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Key to understanding the sociological construction of identity is the possible distinction and dynamics between the private self and the public self, most notably presented by Erving Goffman (1959; 1978), and, later, by Barry Schlenker (1986), alongside other social interaction theorists. The crux of social interaction theory is that people come to view themselves through the role they play in public and how others react to those presentations (Schlenker, 2012). People are considering who they would like to be, and who they feel they can be in a particular social context (Schlenker, 1985). Goffman's (1959) theory of the presentation of the self alludes to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players" (Shakespeare, 2004 [1623]). Goffman (1959) contended that social life is a series of performances in which people project their identities to others. People want to present themselves favorably (Brown, 1998; Williams & Gilovich, 2008), and want to control others' impressions of them, and will therefore consider the audience before revealing which self to present to the public. Interaction with others is part of this consideration: in any given interaction, how will the other person react to what information one is sharing about oneself through voice, language, appearance?

Considering these impressions of others and how they shape the presentation of the self, Schlenker (1986) elaborated on Goffman's theory and concepts of impression management and presentation of the self to distinguish further between the private self and the public self. The private self is the "core of one's inner being" (Schlenker, 1986, p. 21), the part that only one knows and keeps to the self without sharing with others. In contrast, the public self is displayed in social settings (Schlenker, 1986), which conveys to others certain aspects of the self that one feels comfortable sharing.

Literature concerning self-presentation shows that when asked to describe the self, most people offer positive descriptions (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008; Schlenker, 2012), but people tend to be more modest among friends or others with whom a level of emotional comfort exists (Schlenker, 2012). When one is in such a comfortable setting, automaticity is likely to occur, because the individual feels secure and is thinking less about how others perceive them (Schlenker, 2012). Other automatic processes include the chameleon effect, which describes the unconscious mimicry of others' expressions and mannerisms (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Considerations of presentations of the self can also include presentations of the self within conscious awareness, such as deciding to wear designer clothes to impress a group of wealthy socialites (Schlenker, 2012).

Davies and Eynon (2013) note that when young people consider their digital presence, they do so with a sense of their audience, and make conscious decisions about what to share and with whom. The following section will describe the applications of Erikson's (1968) theory of identity and Goffman's (1959; 1978) theory of the presentation of the self to the contemporary time, wherein people must determine which pieces of the self to share with others on social media.

### **2.3.3 Presentations of the Self in Contemporary Society: The Intersection of the Psychological and Sociological Theories of Identity**

In this digital era, presentations of the self are digitally mediated, marking an illustration of the psychological and sociological approaches to understanding identity that were described in the previous sections. Schlenker (2012) concludes that in the digital world, people create identities that tend to be self-flattering, but presentations of the self vary depending on which social networking – or dating, or roleplaying – websites the individual is using to interact with others. It may be easier to stretch the truth about one's height, for example, if the individual is interacting with others on a website and there is little likelihood they will meet in person. Literature illustrates that young people frequently use the Internet (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2011; Kim, Russo, & Amnå, 2017), and often, Internet use is for the purpose of using social networking sites, which allow the creation of profiles and opportunities to present the self in different ways. Sites like Facebook and Instagram enable young people to communicate with their widening social circles and breaks down barriers between the public and private spheres of

communication (Fenton, 2012; Livingstone, 2009). With technology and social media profiles embedded within daily life, it becomes easier for young people to explore and expand their identity through their social media profiles. Young people are deciding which aspects of the self they wish to keep private, and which to bring to the public eye.

Erikson (1968) explained that young people experience confusion as they experiment with different values and goals, leading them to experiment with different identities. In the digital era, young people can interact with new content and opinions that they might not have been exposed to otherwise, yielding them more opportunities to try out alternative identities, values, and beliefs (Turkle, 2011). Technology – and social media in particular – allows young people to have a new space to express themselves, separate from authority and control that they face in other aspects of their lives at home and school (Davies & Eynon, 2013). As Meyrowitz (1985) noted fifteen years before social media arrived, new media have impacted the social stages on which people present themselves. Applying this knowledge and Goffman's (1959) theory to contemporary society, social media is a new stage on which young people may present themselves to others. Interacting with digital media, especially through social media profile creation, has become a part of how today's young people are constructing their identities and sense of self, and presenting themselves to others.

Most social media profiles are designed in a way to provide information about what type of person the user is to other people and to the world (Livingstone, 2009). Some young people portray different identities or aspects of themselves on different social networking sites, but that may not necessarily reflect a change in identity. Rather, it reflects how young people act according to the social context in which they are situated (boyd, 2014). Furthermore, the anonymity of the Internet may allow for more identity experimentation, but not everyone chooses to remain anonymous or present an identity that differs much from one's identity that is presented offline (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). As young people identify themselves with others through social networking sites, some choose to identify with others by *not* creating a social networking profile (Davies & Eynon, 2013).

On social networking and blogging websites such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Tumblr, young people typically establish their identity to others through the use of self-

presentation tools like usernames, which may convey an individual's gender or interests. Association with popular music is also a known way of how adolescents present their identity (Davies & Eynon, 2013; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Social media apps and the Internet can enable people to approach identity formation in a more thoughtful way, connect with others who share similar views and values, and create new identities and technologies (boyd, 2014; Gardner & Davis, 2013; Ito, et al., 2010; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Many social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, incorporate a customizable profile feature, which allows young people to experiment with how they present themselves to the world through their self-identified interests and goals (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). As youth create different social networking profiles, a few websites, like Facebook, ask that users put in their age, location, and sex. Many teenagers play with these mandatory fields, and often invent a name that includes a last name of a celebrity or friend. danah boyd (2014) notes that these young people are “refusing to play by the rules of self-presentation” (p. 46), which are defined by social media sites and instead, are creating their own rules as they create their own identities.

While young people create their own rules for self-presentation as they explore their identities, some young people are creating more than one profile on the same social networking platform as an effort to manage others' impressions of them (Rui & Stefanone, 2013), particularly by deleting one profile and creating a new one to mark a new identity. While young people are still able to present themselves in traditional ways through social media – for example, they can show their networks their new hairstyle through an updated profile picture – in the digital era, there is a new consideration that what is shared digitally is there to stay, and that there are different audiences within each network. For example, young people might have friends, family members, and teachers within their social networks (Rui & Stefanone, 2012), and each of these audiences might expect young people to present a different image. The new hairstyle may have felt exciting for some time, but it is possible that the young person may change their mind and does not want to be immortalized by that photograph and known for that particular hairstyle. Even when content is deleted from one's Facebook profile, some content still remains on Facebook servers (Facebook, 2018b). As young people continue to grow and develop their identities, this may lead some young people into creating new social media profiles to mark their transformation.

Specific goals, such as pursuing approval, can prime individuals to present themselves in such a way that helps them to achieve those goals (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010). In the digital era, this phenomenon is observed when young people post photographs of themselves to pursue approval in the form of Likes and comments from their friends. This presentation of the self for approval is a proxy for how young people see themselves in society, which sheds light on how young people see themselves as part of a group, as citizens or community members (Gecas & Burke, 1995). The overall well being of a group depends on people being able to count on one another to “do what they say they will do and be what they claim to be” (Schlenker, 2012, p. 551). Identity is central to civic identity: how one sees oneself fitting into and contributing to a group or larger society impacts the self they present to that group, and, consequently, the self that is presented is the self that the group expects the person to be (Schlenker, 2012). Young people are in a life stage that is marked by the development of a sense of self and a values and a belief system (Tapscott, 1998), making this a critical period to investigate young people’s civic identity.

## **2.4 Civic Studies: Developing an Understanding of Civic Identity**

Young people come to develop a sense of self, and situate themselves within society, but at the same time, they are becoming aware of issues of public concern and forming opinions about those issues. Young people are developing their understanding of themselves and their beliefs within their communities and how they can responsibly engage in those communities; they are developing their civic identity. This section will develop the definition of civic identity for this study by reviewing the literature on citizenship and civic engagement.

Civic scholars refer to civic identity as a concept that comprises personal and moral values, and includes a sense of connection and belonging to a community, and agency and responsibility for that community (Bers, 2008; Nasir & Kirshner, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Like identity, civic identity is individually and socially constructed (Haste, 2004). Civic identity emerges from participation in informal and formal activities that develops a sense of agency and social responsibility (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997), as well as through engaging in conversations with others, to learn from different perspectives (Knefelkamp, 2008). Adelson (1968) and Adelson and

O’Neill (1966) were among the first to study the civic development of young people, and linked political understanding to cognitive development. Their work demonstrated that young people’s understanding of citizenship expands in adolescence, making young people between the ages of 14 and 17 an ideal population to investigate.

Some scholars see civic identity as a “precondition” for civic engagement. Dahlgren and Olsson (2007) argue that one must feel empowered in such a way that engaging civically is meaningful. Understanding one’s place in the community and society can help one determine the most impactful way for one to engage in the community. However, other scholars note that it could be the other way around: participation in civic activities – engaging civically – also aids in the formation of a civic identity (Knefelkamp, 2008; Nasir & Hand, 2008). This study will provide a better understanding of the relationship between citizenship, civic engagement, and civic identity. The following sections will distinguish between the components of civic identity, which, in addition to a personal component, includes a collective component (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997), specifically related to family influence. Young people learn about democracy and participation first from their families, by observing the civic actions of the adults around them (Hartmann, Carpentier, & Cammaerts, 2007). Discussions about current events and politics with family and friends can impact the process of civic identity formation (Flanagan, 2013).

As civic scholars broadly define civic identity to include personal and collective components, the notion of civic identity has been modified for this study from Knefelkamp (2008) and Youniss and Yates (1997). These scholars refer to a personal reflection component related to citizenship, and a civic engagement component:

- 1) a broader sense of how an individual develops and situates oneself and one’s beliefs within a broader group of people,
- and -
- 2) how that individual engages with others in the social, political, and economic structures within their society.

While there are existing frameworks of conceptualizations of citizenship, a similar framework does not exist for civic engagement – and, most importantly, there is not a

framework that exists which acknowledges these two components to form a single framework of civic identity. The sections that follow will illustrate these two components of civic identity in further detail to illustrate the need for a civic identity framework that addresses both of these components. Presentation of the self is central to civic identity: how one decides to present oneself as part of a group or larger society impacts how one acts in that civic setting (Schlenker, 2012). For example, if an individual is a member of a local Young Republicans group, others in the group and in the wider community may expect that young person to be active in the political party, especially by joining a campaign to canvas for Republican candidates until that young person is eligible to vote for those candidates. This study will shed light on how young people perceive society's expectations of them, and how they in turn choose to present themselves as members of society.

### **2.4.1 Citizenship**

The first key component of civic identity, a personal component, refers to how young people think of themselves as citizens (Hall, Williamson, & Coffey, 1998) belonging to a political community (Mouffe, 1992), and the second component, a collective component, refers to the ways young people think about and participate in civic engagement. Citizenship is an elusive concept (Ignatieff, 1995), but its meanings are guided in “socially-inspired norms” (Linton, 2015, p. 193). For most, citizenship is a birth right (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002), but it is often depicted as a capability based on knowledge and skills, and most often understood in terms of responsibility (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2017), with citizenship as an ideal and a goal (Ireland, Kerr, Lopes, Nelson, & Cleaver, 2006; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Ross, 2008).

Bennett (2008) identified two styles of citizenship: dutiful citizens, who believe their obligation is to participate in government, with voting as the “core democratic act,” and actualized citizens, who have a higher sense of individual purpose, and view other forms of engagement as more valuable and meaningful than voting. The person that Bennett (2008) refers to as a dutiful citizen may be a voter, campaign donor, or political party member, and an actualized citizen may find democratic fulfillment in organizing a protest (Loader, 2007). Similarly, Flanagan (2013) defines a citizen as a person who feels a part of something bigger than the self, and is a member of a political community.

Community membership, and one's sense of what it means to be a citizen, is a central element of civic identity, and has been studied in adult populations. Many young people recognize citizens as people with rights and duties who are part of a community and contribute to the community (Dias & Menezes, 2014). There are different ways of conceptualizing a community (Annette, 2008), including community as a place, and community as a sense of belonging. Community can also be based on the "construction of cultural identities" (Annette, 2008, p. 393), interest, and political ideals. Brint (2001) defines community as an "aggregate of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern" (p. 8). Research on the understanding of a sense of community goes back to the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and still applies today. Social bonding and connection is a notable element of a sense of community, as studied by Riger and Lavrakas (1981). This bonding leads to a feeling of membership, influence and sense of mattering, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection with others (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This fraternalism and mutual support (Brint, 2001) yields desires for communities to serve as spaces offering opportunities to facilitate civic values, education, experiences, and action (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

Flanagan's (2013) aforementioned idea of citizenship as a socio-political stance and sense of belonging can help young people to better understand and participate in democracy. Within the context of a growing public concern about the perceived apathy and disengagement among young people, Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003; 2005) conducted a study of young people aged 16 – 23 in the United Kingdom to understand how they view their transitions to citizenship, which is one of few studies examining this concept with this age group. Other, limited, research focuses on children between the ages of 5 and 14 (Dias & Menezes, 2014). From Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox's (2003; 2005) research, five themes of citizenship emerged, involving young people's perceptions of citizenship to include the following themes:

- 1) *Universal Status* – feeling like one belongs, including all people in a community as citizens;
- 2) *Social Contract* – abiding by the rights and duties that are governed by the law;
- 3) *Respectable Economic Independence* – having waged employment, paying taxes, having a house and a family;
- 4) *Constructive Social Participation* – being an active citizen contributing to and helping the community;
- 5) *The Right to a Voice* – feeling that one has a voice and is heard, with voting as a symbolic action of this theme of citizenship.

Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox's (2003; 2005) model is the most recent model of how young people conceptualize citizenship, and the most applicable to the study presented in this thesis. While the above model presents five distinct themes, in this model there is an absence of technology and its possible role in these understandings of citizenship, and the civic engagement experiences of young people. Bennett, Wells, and Freelon's (2011) work assessed styles of citizenship present within United States-based civic organizations' websites. However, this study focused primarily on the websites, site traffic, and potential civic learning opportunities embedded in the sites, rather than how young people experienced citizenship. The study presented in this thesis seeks to address these gaps to provide a more nuanced understanding of how young people conceptualize citizenship in contemporary society.

Views about rights and responsibilities, and participation experiences, contribute to young people's own political theories and civic identity (Flanagan, 2013; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Developments in young people's own lives tend to determine the extent to which they identify as citizens (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2005), which the study presented in this thesis seeks to discover. The concept of *lived citizenship*, the meaning and experience of citizenship in everyday lives (Hall & Williamson, 1999), is of particular interest in contemporary society because it can include the digital, which is present in the lives of many young people.

*Lived citizenship* is not to be confused with *digital citizenship*. The term *digital citizenship* most often refers to the ability to make sense of and navigate the digital world (Hargittai, 2002; Seale & Dutton, 2012), particularly the skills involved in conducting one's behavior with digital tools (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickuhr, & Rainie, 2011). Cyberbullying, sexting, and copyright infringement are among the behaviors that are discouraged, while exercising caution for one's own privacy and the privacy of others (Ohler, 2011), and ethically accessing and using information and helping others to do the same (Thomas, 2018) are behaviors that are encouraged. Moreover, other scholars use the term *digital citizenship* to describe access to digital tools as a right of citizens (Journell, 2007; Oyedemi, 2015).

Emejulu and McGregor (2016) advocate for digital citizenship to move beyond these skills-based and rights-based interpretations to include the ability of individuals and groups to think critically about the socio-political, economic, and environmental impact of technology on everyday life and to collectively improve technology and digital practices. Further investigations into this type of alternative view of digital citizenship range from digital media's implications for civic culture (Couldry, Stephansen, Fotopoulou, MacDonald, Clark, & Dickens, 2014), to how citizenship behaviors are changing in an era where technology has made surveillance capabilities easier (Polat & Pratchett, 2014).

*Digital citizenship*, as it is often used, vaguely conceptualizes the interplay between citizenship and the digital, and is not a helpful term when investigating the conceptualizations of citizenship in contemporary society, when so many interactions are digitally mediated. It is therefore important to think beyond this term of digital citizenship, and instead consider the notion of *lived citizenship* and how young people fit into and participate their communities and contemporary society in their everyday lives, which can involve sentiments and behaviors that are mediated by technology. I aim to do this in this study through in-depth interviews with young people to focus on their lived experiences as young people in today's world.

The literature presented in this section has demonstrated that there is a need to investigate the nuances in understanding of citizenship and how it develops in this digital era. While the models presented by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003;

2005) encompass a variety of conceptualizations of citizenship, they address citizenship as experienced by an age group that includes people of voting age, and do not deeply consider the lived citizenship of young people. The ways in which young people between the ages of 14 – 17 understand citizenship may differ from older populations, especially because young people do not have the same opportunities for engagement as adults – primarily because they cannot vote – and they have varying levels of efficacy in accordance with their prior civic experiences and current place in society.

Contemporary society expects young people to either be apathetic and disengaged politically, or engaged in politics through digital means.

### **2.4.2 Civic Engagement of Young People**

The second component of civic identity is civic engagement: how an individual engages with others in the social, political, and economic structures within their society with the aim to improve them. While there is no single, widely agreed upon definition of civic engagement (Adler & Goggin, 2005), the term encompasses activities like community associations and involvement (Milner, 2009). A recent Google search of “*civic engagement*” found over 84,800,000 citations for the term.<sup>4</sup> Definitions vary, particularly pertaining to: the concepts of knowledge versus action; whether the national or global scale is emphasized; whether engagement pertains to citizens engaging with each other or with institutions; the importance of ethics; how it is tied to democracy; desired social and political outcomes (Levine, 2012). Definitions of engagement most often fall into categories such as community service, collective action, political involvement, and social change (Adler & Goggin, 2005).

After evaluating conceptualizations of civic engagement set forth by civic scholars (Delli Carpini, 2000; Kahne & Middaugh, 2009; Levinson, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008; Rheingold, 2008), I decided that the definitions of civic engagement set forth by Rheingold (2008) and Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008) are most relevant to young people’s lived citizenship in today’s world. These definitions allow for both digitally mediated and broad interpretations of civic engagement. With the understanding of lived citizenship, the definition of civic engagement *should* be broad to include what is civic in the everyday lives of young people (Bell, 2005). To

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<sup>4</sup> Google search conducted on 30 May 2018.

this end, the most appropriate definitions of *civic engagement* will follow a combination of the following two definitions. First, the definition of civic engagement as “participation in the public sphere through direct experience with online publishing, discourse, debate, co-creation of culture, and collective action” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 102), and second, as “any activity aimed at improving one’s community” (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008, p. 162). The digital is embedded in everyday lives, and therefore it is necessary to consider how it might be embedded within civic activities. Civic activities include service-oriented endeavors, political participation, and “activism activities in which youth engage to improve their worlds” (Weinstein, 2014, p. 212).

The literature and policy debate has primarily focused on the disengagement of young voters in politics. Some believe this disengagement is a result of a decline in social capital (Putnam, 2000; Smith, 1999), others say that young people are excluded from the process, and lack forms of traditional forms of participation. Because young people lack access to traditional forms of participation, such as voting, they may be drawn toward more accessible forms of engagement (Delgado & Staples, 2007; Ginwright, 2009). But, there is more to civic engagement than voter turnout rates (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002), and despite the persistent view that young people are disengaged, recent literature suggests that young people are interested in politics and are civically engaged, just in non-traditional ways (Henn & Foard, 2012). For example, Barrett and Zani (2014) argue that non-traditional forms of engagement include signing petitions, participating in political demonstrations, and writing political posts on blogs, among other means.

The focus on young people’s disengagement is a result of the debate about young people focusing on what young people are *not* doing, such as voting in high turnout rates (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2017), and therefore views and portrays them as deficient citizens (Eden & Roker, 2002). When the focus shifts to what young people *are* doing, the picture becomes different, and shows young people engaged in their communities (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2005). While young voters have lower voter turnout than their older counterparts, and often exhibit disenchantment with politics, young people are politically engaged (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). Roughly 40 per cent of young people engage in at least one act of politics (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012). We cannot say there is a decline in

civic engagement if we are considering digitally mediated civic engagement to be included in that term (Earl & Schussman, 2008). Today's young people are engaged in civic life (Kawashima-Ginsburg, 2011), but their efforts no longer have to be tied to formal institutions (Soep, 2015), and can be done digitally.

Societal changes can be achieved with the civic engagement and activism of young people (Teruelle, 2012) and their voices. When many voices come together, collective action benefits. Peter Levine (2008) highlights that “institutions work better when many people participate” (p. 120), that social justice results from equitable participation, and that people – not just legislation – can directly address some public problems. Young people today are interested in issues of public concern (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). Teruelle (2012) draws parallels between contemporary youth and the young people in the 1960s and 1970s who were active in civil rights, social justice, women's rights, and the anti-war movement. Young people today and 50 years ago were passionate and motivated by issues that had a direct or personal impact on their lives (Teruelle, 2012). While young people are motivated by these issues and concerns, many young people feel that their concerns are not being represented or heard, which may dissuade them from civic engagement in the future (Mesch & Coleman, 2007). There is speculation – even hope – that young people will turn to the Internet to engage and share their voices, so it is important to address the debate among scholars regarding the impact of the Internet on civic engagement behaviors.

### ***Digitally Mediated Civic Engagement***

There is an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the impact of the Internet on daily lives, as well as on civic engagement. Prominent media scholar danah boyd (2007a) argues that the “digital does not replace the physical,” while Don Tapscott (1998) argues that the digital world reflects the physical world. I will argue further that the digital experience of the self and civic engagement is an extension of and an addition to the physical experiences, as growing evidence points to young people taking advantage of the opportunities to engage with politics through digital means (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010).

Many scholars have made distinctions between what online and offline engagement look like (Kahne & Bowyer, 2018). For some, online engagement means engaging in Jenkins's (2009) participatory politics activities on the Internet: creating content, connecting with others, collaborating with others, and circulating content; offline engagement includes offline attending political events, donating money to political campaigns, taking part in protests, and working on election campaigns. While some scholars argue there is a difference, I do not believe a distinction is necessary. Anything that Jenkins (2009) believes you can do using the Internet is possible without it. Similarly, in contemporary society, it is possible to do traditionally offline activities in digitally mediated ways. For example, people learn about political events through Facebook, and can watch them via Live Streaming. As Kahne and Bowyer (2018) identify in their work, campaign donations can be made using apps and candidate websites, and there is a significant part of campaigning now done through social media. I do not distinguish between civic engagement online and offline, and instead view civic engagement as digitally mediated. There are hypothesized differences between online and offline civic engagement, which will be discussed below.

There are four hypotheses for how online and offline political participation could be related. First, the *independence hypothesis* depends on the argument that online and offline spheres are independent of each other (Emmer, Wolling, & Vowe, 2012). Sometimes, this is because of the perceived amount of resources required for participation in either sphere. Some argue that online participatory activities require fewer resources (Hirzalla & Van Zoonen, 2011); sharing an article or post on Facebook condemning racism does not cost as much time as joining a Black Lives Matter march. Second, the *spill over hypothesis* posits that offline political actors utilize online tools to further their influence (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 2002; Krueger, 2002; Norris, 2001; Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton, 2002). Relatedly, Norris's (2000) mobilization thesis further posits that the Internet will only mobilize those who are already engaged, as do a host of other scholars (Bimber, 1999; Bonfadelli, 2002; Hendriks Vettehen, Hagemann, & Van Snippenburg, 2004; Krueger, 2002; Norris, 2001; Polat, 2005; Weber, Loumakis, & Bergman, 2003). Third, the *gateway hypothesis* is derived from the proposition that online participation gives way to subsequent offline participation (Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012; Livingstone, 2007; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Internet use could therefore mobilize politically inactive populations

(Barber, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2000; Krueger, 2002; Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003; Weber, Loumakis, & Bergman, 2003), including young people, who are the age group most likely to be online (Delli Carpini, 2000). Finally, the *reciprocity hypothesis* suggests that online and offline political activities mutually affect each other (Nam, 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014).

Despite the aforementioned distinctions between online and offline engagement, the lines between these types of civic engagement continue to be blurred as technology becomes more entwined in daily life. I subscribe to the reciprocity hypothesis, and question whether it is meaningful to separate the online and offline spheres, as it is possible that the online sphere mirrors or enhances what is already happening offline. The distinction between online and offline may no longer be necessary, as the digital world is very much a part of everyday reality for the young people in the contemporary society, and interactions and daily life are often digitally mediated. This study aims to discover how young people are experiencing civic engagement, and whether the reciprocity hypothesis is most applicable for the participants in this study. Similarly, this debate between online versus offline motivates the investigation into the role of technology in how young people decide to present themselves to others in contemporary society.

## **2.5 The Significance of Civic Education for Civic Engagement**

Literature demonstrates that education, especially civic education, is an important factor in civic and political participation (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009; Levinson, 2010). Embedded within the United States public education tradition is the notion that education should prepare young people for their role as citizens to contribute to the nation's democratic way of life. Research has demonstrated that exposure to civic learning opportunities through education is a strong predictor of later civic engagement (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Keating & Janmaat, 2015), and can also provide young people with a sense of purpose and efficacy, enhance political equality, and increase the likelihood of participation in adult civic life (Flanagan, 2013; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Levine & Youniss, 2009). Civic characteristics and skills of adolescents include moral character, confidence, caring, contributing to the community, respectful argumentation, debate, and information literacy (Bers, 2008). Overall, these skills and capabilities are

overwhelmingly positive (Benton, Cleaver, Featherstone, Kerr, Lopes, & Whitby, 2008), and can be developed through civics curriculum, which can also serve as an opportunity to teach critical thinking, social analysis, and skills of deliberation (Westheimer, 2004).

The United States of America has had a longstanding tradition of education for democracy, which still prevails. Civic republicanism – the ideal of cooperation among citizens and government, civic participation, and patriotism – is the national ethos that has pervaded the United States throughout the upbringing of today’s young people aged 14 through 17 (Journell, 2010). Despite this national ethos, and presumed importance of civic education, a decline in resources in school systems has led to a lack of civic education curriculum since the 1960s (Levinson, 2010). In 2003, federal expenditures on civic education totaled less than half of one per cent of the overall United States Department of Education budget (Westheimer, 2004). In contemporary society, 71 per cent of school districts have reported decreasing time on subjects like civics to make more space for mathematics instruction (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Furthermore, the amount and scope of civic education curriculum has decreased, starting fifteen years ago. In 2003, Shelley Berman, former superintendent of schools in Hudson, Massachusetts, noted that Massachusetts “significantly de-emphasized civics in the state standards” (Miller, 2004, p. 4). Nystrand, Gamoran, and Carbonaro (2001) found that political discussions only take place in 10 per cent of classrooms. Nearly a decade later still, Journell (2010) found that in schools, “conversations about citizenship rarely extend beyond one’s right to vote” (p. 351).

What was once commonplace in American schools has now become a rare component of curriculum: as of 2016, the Education Commission of the States in the United States found that most states do not include civics as a part of their accountability systems (Railey & Brennan, 2016). For those states that do have standards for civics curriculum, those standards include: demonstrating the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, what it means to participate civically and responsibly, understanding democratic beliefs and principles, political and legal processes, appreciation for diversity and commitment to the common good (Railey & Brennan, 2016). While citizenship education is sometimes supported through state standards and local school board missions, policymakers and education advocates are concerned that “public education’s function

of training young people for democratic citizenship is being pushed aside” (Miller, 2004, p. 1). Curriculum across the United States has all but dismantled civics (Lithwick, 2018), with a majority of schools failing to provide civic education (Kirshner, 2004; Larson, 2000).

The state of civic education in the United States has been transformed from a robust civics curriculum in the 1950s and 1960s to barely existent today. Recently, funding for civic education has been cut in favor of investing more into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010). The reallocation of funding suggests that United States public schools are preparing for an increasingly digital world, where young people would need to be equipped with more knowledge about STEM subjects than about active citizenship. This focus on STEM has become problematic because it has left civic education in decline. Young people are receiving less civic education as a result, which has been unfortunate for the status of civic engagement as well: civic education begets civic engagement, which informs one’s civic identity and can yield an increase in development of political voice (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010).

Howard Rheingold (2008) defines voice as a “unique style of personal expression that distinguishes one’s communications from those of others... [voice] can help connect young people’s involvement in identity formation with their potential engagement with society as citizens” (p. 101). Voice is related to civic identity because voice gives individuals a means of presenting and expressing themselves to others. Voice yields personal efficacy, which is the belief that one can produce desired effects by their actions (Bandura, 2008). Associated with civic engagement, internal political efficacy refers to one’s perception of their own ability to effectively participate in the political process (Balch, 1974) and has a positive relationship to one engaging in political activity (Wollman & Stouder, 1991). External political efficacy refers to perceptions of how the government and related institutions respond to citizens’ needs (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). When one’s voice is heard, individuals receive affirmation of their political and social beliefs, and a greater sense of efficacy can be achieved. How one sees oneself in relation to others impacts their sense of efficacy: if an individual is comfortable sharing their identity with others and being a member of a group or society,

they will perceive greater social support from that group (Guan & So, 2016) and, in turn, feel that their voice will be heard.

Individuals have different purposes for their voices, as they have different values (Bandura, 2008). When values differ, so does motivation to participate in civic engagement, and the sense of efficacy that one has with these civic actions. While differences in values result in different levels of efficacy, socioeconomic status can reveal differences in efficacy and voice as well. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) found that there is a discrepancy in civic engagement among those of high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status. Higher income earners (over \$75,000 per year), in comparison to lower income earners (under \$15,000 per year) are twice as likely to contact an elected official or engage in a protest. Higher income earners are also nearly three times more likely to participate in informal community activities, and over four times more likely to work on a campaign compared to lower earners (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Discrepancies in socioeconomic status demonstrate that the ability to discuss and deliberate is not equal. In the political culture in the United States, some citizens who are already underrepresented – like those of lower socioeconomic status – become even more underrepresented by those who are better at articulating their arguments – those from higher socioeconomic status and education levels – thereby making the underrepresented voices even less powerful (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Technology may deepen this inequality: previous research indicates that the Internet increases levels of civic engagement, particularly among those who are socioeconomically advantaged and who already have an interest in becoming civically engaged (Oser, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013). The discrepancy in civic engagement that Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) discovered refers to what Levinson (2010) calls the *civic empowerment gap*: individuals from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to engage in civic activities, because they have had more experiences and resources to empower them to do so. This study seeks to examine the civic experiences of young people, and how young people perceive their place in society and efficacy to engage civically to best inform the practices needed to reinvigorate civic education.

## 2.6 Summary

The themes presented in this chapter all intersect where they meet the concepts of civic identity and civic engagement in the digital era. Technology in contemporary society could be a way to amplify voice, which is especially important for young people, who need their voices to be heard to make future contributions to the society that they live in. When they feel they are making a difference by being civically engaged– and receive positive reinforcement for that engagement – they will stay engaged (Bandura, 2008). Civic identity – one’s conceptualization of citizenship and civic engagement – directly impacts how one perceives their own ability to make a difference. If sharing one’s voice is an integral part of being an active citizen (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2005), then voice is a key component of civic identity. Civic education is what ties all of these elements together, by providing young people with a space to develop their own voice through learning how to discuss issues of public concern with others.

While previous studies have each explored one or more of these aforementioned themes, this critical review of academic literature has found that few studies have investigated the ways in which contemporary society and the civic sphere intersect for young people ages 14 through 17. Previous research in civic studies has examined young people’s understandings of political participation (Sant, 2014), citizenship (Ataman, Çok, & Şener, 2012), and behaviors associated with political engagement (Sveningsson, 2016), but have not investigated citizenship and civic engagement together to understand civic identity. Some studies focus on only the most engaged young people (Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015), and still further studies in the civic and youth studies spheres consider young people over the age of 18 (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Watkins, 2009; Weinstein, 2014; Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015; Youniss & Levine, 2009b). Moreover, while there is a plethora of research on civic engagement, there a paucity of qualitative research examining civic identity and its components (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2005). Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths (2018) conducted the first study that specifically considers young people’s conceptualization of political engagement, and the study presented in this thesis seeks to add to the growing body of research in this area, addressing civic identity as experienced by young people aged 14 – 17 growing up in contemporary society.

The study presented in this thesis considers young people under the age of 18 in the United States, and inquires about the participants' understandings of citizenship and civic engagement. The United States lends itself well as the social and educational context for this study, as the tradition of education for democratic citizenship is embedded in public schooling. Civic education has been a longstanding value of the United States public education system, and evidence points to its significance for later civic engagement (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). As this literature review has demonstrated, there has been a lack of empirical research on contemporary civic experiences that focuses on young people between the ages of 14 and 17 years old, who have yet to reach voting age. Prior research has contributed a model to illustrate how young people have conceptualized citizenship (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003; 2005), but this model does not consider technology and its implication in these conceptualizations of citizenship. In this rapidly changing world, a first step in addressing these gaps is a study to gather rich qualitative data from 14 – 17 year olds considering their own perspectives on identity, citizenship, and civic engagement in contemporary society.

## **Chapter Three | Methodology**

# **Research Methodology**

Chapter Three will detail the research methods used in this study. The chapter begins with the research aims and research questions before detailing the methodological approach. The chapter delves into the data collection and analysis processes before concluding with the ethical considerations that informed this study.

### **3.1 Research Aims and Questions**

#### **3.1.1 Research Aims**

This study endeavors to uncover the perspectives of young people, aged 14 through 17, growing up in today's digital era to better understand how civic identity is developed and how civic engagement activities are experienced among this age group in contemporary society. Previously, Buckingham (2000) observed that young people have been excluded from politics based on their perceived immaturity as an age group. But, in order for young people to be expected to be active citizens, others must believe them capable of doing so. As researchers, we must understand and perceive through a moral and political lens that young people have a position in the world, and their experiences and perspectives matter (Greene & Hill, 2005). We must shift our thinking and view youth as assets, rather than a population that has problems, like dropping out of school and low voter turnout (Hart & Kirshner, 2009; Youniss & Levine, 2009).

This study included participants within this age group with the assumption that young people are capable of making decisions and informing themselves of issues of public

concern, as well as engaging civically. If adults and researchers assume that young people are inadequate and incapable, we are at fault. This population of individuals has previously been excluded from studies about conceptions of citizenship and civic engagement, but research has demonstrated that young people use technology in a multitude of ways (Davies & Eynon, 2013), and civically engage in many ways (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). This study therefore investigates what young people experience and understand about their civic lives in contemporary society.

By learning how this age group thinks about how they present themselves to others, their civic identities, and their approaches to engaging in the political world, we can better understand the tools and skills that young people need— technology-based and otherwise – in order to develop into contributing and responsible members of their communities and society. Schools retain the duty to educate future citizens, and schools may use the knowledge gathered from this study to inform civic education curriculum and best practices for civic engagement in contemporary society.

### **3.1.2 Research Questions**

Informed by the literature review and research aims, the following section refines the research questions presented in Chapter One. The research questions are as follows:

**1. In what ways do young people, ages 14 through 17, present themselves to others in contemporary society?** The processes by which individuals undertake identity formation are not straightforward, and are particular to each person. Delving into the thought process behind which young people make decisions about themselves and their identity is critical to understanding how young people present themselves to others, and how they perceive their place in the world. Erikson's (1968) theory of identity and Goffman (1959; 1978) and Schlenker's (1986; 2012) work on social interaction theory inform the findings that address this research question in Chapter Four.

**2. What are the mechanisms through which young people form their civic identity in this digital era, and how do young people understand citizenship and civic engagement?** Flanagan (2013) highlights that is little known about

how this age group thinks about their own citizenship. Young people are in a critical life stage during which they are forming their own personal identities, and at this stage, they are simultaneously forming a civic identity. This age group is known to create online profiles and experiment with identity using online profiles (boyd, 2014; Gardner & Davis, 2013; Ito, et al., 2010; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Therefore, it is important to understand how young people consider their civic identities in contemporary society, and how technology may inform this civic identity development. The processes by which young people form their civic identities and think about their communities are essential to understanding the factors that govern young people's civic engagement. Findings that address this research question will be the focus of Chapter Five.

**3. What are the means through which young people engage in the political world, and what factors contribute to this engagement?** Today, scholars debate whether youth appear less concerned with economic, social, and political issues, due to the perception that the issues do not directly affect them (Galland, 2007), or if it is a myth that youth are self-absorbed and not concerned with public affairs (Youniss & Levine, 2009). But what are young people's thoughts and reasoning for their own civic engagement, digitally mediated and more generally? Literature highlighting the distinctions between the private and public self will help to explain elements of this research question when it is addressed through the findings presented in Chapter Six.

### **3.2 Methodological Approach**

The epistemological and ontological approach of this study has been shaped by Bakardjieva's (2005) work, Dey's (1993) theory of qualitative research, and Crotty's (1998) conceptualizations of epistemology and ontology. Bakardjieva (2005) highlights that the Internet, and its associated technologies, have become a truly quotidian piece of life in today's society. Dey (1993) asserts that qualitative research is interested in meanings: the meanings of words, of how people make sense of their interactions, and connections between social phenomena, such as how people define situations. Crotty

(1998) asks questions of epistemology – what it means to know – and ontology – what it means to exist in the world (p. 11).

Bakardjieva's (2005) focus on daily life leads to these conceptions of epistemology, or "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) and ontology, or the study of being. Prior research on technology in everyday life demonstrates that we have some knowledge about individuals' meaning making of daily life with technology (Bakardjieva, 2005; boyd, 2007b; Ito, et al., 2010; Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker, 2015; Xenos & Foot, 2008). We also know that in contemporary society, we exist *with technology*. Some young people cannot live without it, and use their smartphones, tablets, and others digital devices constantly (Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker, 2015).

The epistemological approach that shaped this study comes from the theory of knowledge regarding technology in everyday life, in consideration of the contributions of Bakardjieva's (2005) study on the Internet in the home. It is understood that technology has become interwoven into daily activities and interactions, especially among young people, because there is empirical evidence to demonstrate this (Bakardjieva, 2005; boyd, 2007b; Ito, et al., 2010; Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker, 2015; Xenos & Foot, 2008). Bakardjieva's (2005) study revealed two important conclusions that shaped the theory of knowledge that informed this study. First, at the time of Bakardjieva's (2005) writing, the Internet allowed the home to be "the physical entry point to a global network of computers, content, and people" (p. 37). This knowledge prompted me to consider that in contemporary society, technology such as smartphones and tablets expand these entry points outside of the home. With these devices and the Internet access they provide, young people may experience connection to other people, ideas, and information is made possible at any time and any place in daily life. Second, Bakardjieva's (2005) study demonstrated that individuals who use technology are active contributors to the development of technology, and their experiences of them. That is to say, young people's everyday experiences of technology shape how they view and use technology (Bakardjieva, 2005, p. 38). From Bakardjieva's (2005) conclusions, I surmised that young people would be surrounded by ideas and information that might influence their experiences as young people in contemporary society, to varying degrees with their use of and engagement with

technology, and found a need to better understand this possible phenomenon by interviewing young people to learn their experiences.

Furthermore, Crotty's (1998) thoughts on epistemology and ontology informed the methodological approach to this study by prompting me to consider the state of being, and in particular the state of young people in contemporary society, and how young people view themselves in the world. The need for this understanding inspired me to conduct a qualitative study to investigate the civic experiences of young people, and how these civic experiences might be digitally mediated. Having worked with young people in my capacity as a tutor, mentor, and teacher, I have always been surprised when young people share with me that no one seems to understand or want to hear their perspectives on being a young person in today's digital era. This provides an even more urgent need to understand young people's experiences of being in contemporary society, through qualitative methods that allow the participants and myself as the researcher to make meaning of the experiences that are shared in the interview setting.

Bakardjieva's (2005) ontological approach of constructivism is key to the methodological approach to the study presented in this thesis because of the acknowledgment that individuals associate different meanings and uses of the same technology. Constructivism posits that knowledge is constructed through meaning making, through experiences and ideas (Harlow, Cummings, & Aberasturi, 2007; Piaget, 1952). Bakardjieva's (2005) constructivist understanding resonates with my own observations of a daily life that is increasingly digitally mediated, and that the experiences in everyday life shape individuals' meaning making of the technology they choose to use, and for what purposes. For example, for some individuals, utilizing a laptop might equate to producing assignments for school using word processing software; for others, utilizing a laptop might mean freedom to explore ideas, opinions, and current events using the Internet. Similarly, uses of social media apps go beyond connecting to others – the initial purpose of social media – and may also serve as a way of presenting different aspects of the self to others through sharing selfies and status updates.

Constructivism is often associated with qualitative methods, and positivism with quantitative methods (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Research on the civic engagement of

young people has been moving toward a constructivist approach, including focus groups (Dias & Menezes, 2014; Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018), observations (Serriere, 2014), and interviews (Weinstein, 2014). There is a need to add to this growing body of qualitative inquiry, specifically around the civic experiences of young people. Furthermore, Bakardjieva (2005) contends that everyday life comprises both the private and public sphere, including activities that are digitally mediated and those that are not. The methodological approach to this study reflects the knowledge that young people's daily lives are digitally mediated at school, at their after school programs, and in their homes, and that young people may choose to keep some aspects of their lives and identities private. Interviews were selected as the most appropriate method to understand these experiences of young people, as there is still more to know and understand about technology in young people's daily lives, particularly the role of technology in how young people define and experience citizenship and civic engagement.

Inspired by Bakardjieva's (2005) contribution to knowledge and the constructivist approach to understanding meaning through the engagement with the world around us, I have taken an interpretivist approach to the qualitative research presented in this thesis. Interpretivism is a constructivist view of social reality (Blaikie, 2004), and in the case of this study, the civic experiences of young people. Dey (1993) asserts that qualitative research is interested in meanings: the meanings of words, of how people make sense of their interactions, and connections between social phenomena, such as how people define situations. In setting out to conduct this research, I sought to understand the meaning that young people were making of their own experiences.

I have taken an interpretivist approach to this study, believing that participants' interpretations and meaning-making of daily life, the factors that shape their identity, their views about citizenship, their habits of technology use, and their decisions to engage civically are all legitimate and relevant. There are many truths and experiences – no single participant's experience is held above the rest. Moreover, I am interested in young people and how they interact with the world around them, including interactions with other people and technology. Meaning is not only constructed by young people's interactions with their peers and other social influences, but is also constructed through their participation in the research process for this study. Building upon these

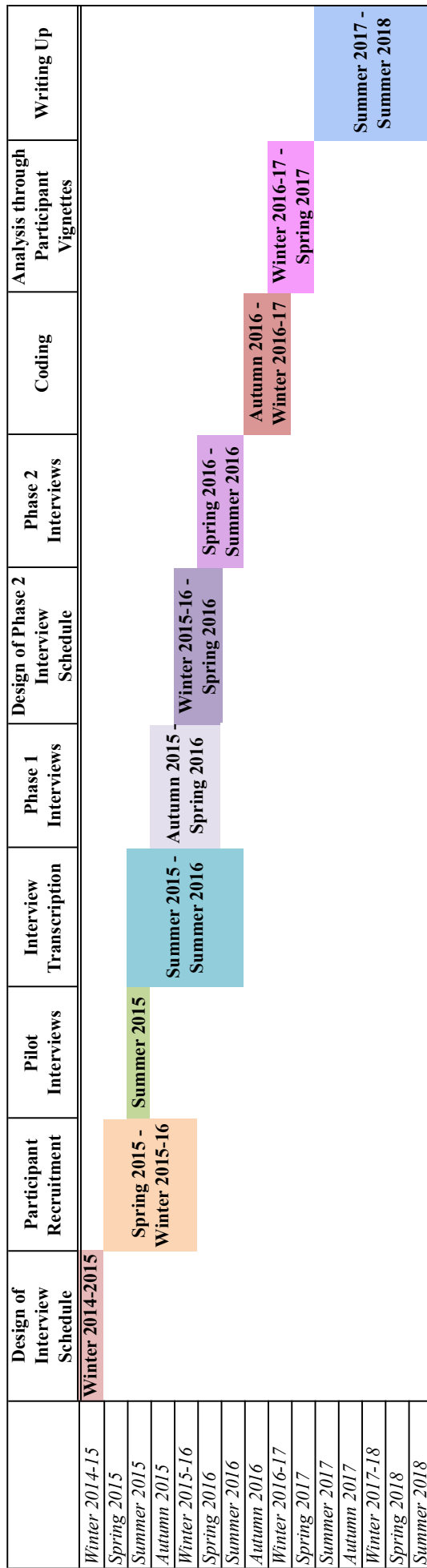
epistemological and ontological foundations, I chose a qualitative approach to methodology and investigated the research questions through in-depth one-on-one interviews with participants aged 14 through 17. This section will provide a brief overview of and justification for the data collection method used for this study.

I determined that in-depth interviews were the best way by which to come to a better understanding of the thoughts and experiences of young people in this age group. In-depth interviewing is most appropriate when “the knowledge sought is often taken for granted and not readily articulated . . . where the research question involves highly conflicted emotions, and where different individuals . . . involved in the same line of activity have complicated, multiple perspectives on some phenomenon” (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 101). Moreover, individual interviews are practical when the research investigates topics that focus on individual experiences (Beitin, 2012). The research questions of this study align appropriately with these aforementioned aims: as a researcher, I am interested in all of the possible perspectives that participants could bring to the concepts of identity, citizenship, and civic engagement. Atkinson (2012) highlights that the best way to learn about a person’s experience is through an exchange: “How else can we come to know the . . . interactional nature of a lived experience that the personal narrative expresses but through a relational exchange?” (p. 123).

Before concluding that in-depth interviews were the most appropriate data collection method, I considered other three other qualitative methods to collect data for this study: focus groups, fieldwork observations, and virtual ethnography; I also considered the quantitative data collection method of survey questionnaires. I determined these methods inappropriate for the nature of this study, for several reasons. While focus groups may prompt young people to think about things they might have forgotten to say or might not have said in a private setting, it is the public nature of the focus group that is problematic for this study (Elwood & Martin, 2004; Greene & Hill, 2005). Such a public forum would not be the appropriate method for delving into topics such as personal identity and personal engagement with technology (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Furthermore, interactions between participants is difficult to analyze systematically, and participants might alter their answers in the presence of others (Beitin, 2012) In addition, field observations alone would not allow me to understand the reflective thought process of the participants, which is a key component to

understanding civic identity. As is described in the Section 2.3, identity formation is an iterative and reflective process (Kvale, 1996). It would not do justice to the research to disregard these reflections from the data collection. Given the topic of this study, virtual ethnography was also a consideration as a data collection method. Virtual ethnography applies ethnography and the study of communities and social formation to online settings (Hine, 2008). While I wanted to learn about the community membership felt and exhibited by young people, I wanted to keep the scope of the idea of community as broad as possible, allowing for young people the opportunity to discuss their sense of belonging in communities in face-to-face settings as well. Furthermore, survey questionnaires are not appropriate for the nature of this study, because they are not as personal and fail to capture the “holistic picture” of the individual (Goode, 2010).

To best investigate the research questions, I set out to recruit participants for two phases of in-depth interviews. The first phase of data was gathered through one-on-one 45- to 60-minute interviews with each of the 46 participants recruited for the study. Participant recruitment will be further detailed in section 3.3.1, “Population and Sample.” Location is critical in the sampling of this study (Schwandt, 2007). This study was conducted in the United States of America, where public education was created for the education of young democratic citizens. The ethos of civic republicanism provides the context in which the target population for this study has grown up, which has informed these individuals’ civic experiences. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, it is the nature of social networking websites to be available and accessible to users around the world, and I acknowledge that some participants in this study have interacted with their peers within and outside of the geographical region where the study was conducted. Detailed methods for fieldwork will be further described in section 3.3, “Qualitative Fieldwork.” Figure 2 illustrates the research design of this study.



**Figure 2: Research Design.**

### **3.3 Qualitative Fieldwork**

#### **3.3.1 Population and Sample**

Qualitative samples “tend to be more purposive than random” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 36). As such, participants for this study were chosen purposively for their relevance to the research question (Schwandt, 2007), and to “gain rich data, further develop theoretical categories, and discover variations and gaps within or across categories” (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 359). The study’s goal to understand in-depth the perceptions and experiences of young people lends itself well to maximum variation sampling, a specific type of purposive sampling that aims to capture central themes and outcomes among a large variation in participants (Patton, 1990).

Sandelowski (1993) asserts that researchers seeking variation in their sample must determine what kind of variation they want to maximize, and when to maximize each kind. In this qualitative study, I sought a sample of young people who could speak to the range and variation of civic experiences that young people might have in a range of different backgrounds to allow for rich interviews that would help me learn a great deal about the “issues of central importance” to the study (Patton, 1990, p. 169). For example, it was important to achieve a sample of participants from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, because, as discussed in Chapter Two, there is a discrepancy in civic engagement among those of a high socioeconomic background and low socioeconomic background (Hyman & Levine, 2008; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Moreover, socioeconomic background also influences whether the participants have access to technology (Middaugh & Kirshner, 2015). As the motivation for this study is the digitally mediated nature of daily life, it was important to recruit participants who would have a range of experiences with technology as well. Consideration of the differences in socioeconomic backgrounds provided a context to understand the experiences of young people, specifically, the variation in young people’s civic engagement and engagement with technology. I therefore aimed for my sample to provide insight into varying levels of socioeconomic backgrounds, and I achieved this variation in sampling by recruiting participants from different school types and after school programs that serve different groups of young people. The participants from the private school setting tended to be of higher socioeconomic backgrounds compared to the participants from the sports-based afterschool program that serves students from underserved urban areas. This study

yielded high quality, detailed interviews, which document both the unique individual experiences of each participant as well as shared patterns that originate significance from having emerged from these unique accounts (Patton, 1990).

Adolescents are “principally secondary schoolchildren” (Galland, 2007, p. 58). Therefore, this study investigated a sample of secondary schoolchildren in the United States. In the United States, secondary school serves young people aged 14 through 17. Based on prior knowledge of this age group, young people aged 14 through 17 are in the critical period of discovering and developing their own identity (Erikson, 1968). Studying this life stage can help researchers better understand cognitive and social developments that take place in adolescence, and the experiences that individuals have during that period (Davies & Eynon, 2013). Moreover, examining the thoughts and beliefs of participants from each age in this range provides in-depth insight into the inner-workings of the minds and identity formation across adolescence. I anticipated finding differences in the ways in which young people thought about the concepts that arose throughout the course of the interview, depending on their age and growth experiences.

This study intentionally included participants under the age of 18, as age 18 marks legal adulthood in the United States, and the age at which young people can vote, a widely recognized “key measure of active citizenship” (Coleman, 2007, p. 173). I was interested to learn about young people’s ideas of citizenship and community membership and what it means to be civically engaged without that ability to vote. There were two participants who had turned 18 years old by the time I interviewed them. I elected to include them in the study because they were 17 years old when I began participant recruitment and decided to participate, and had turned 18 years old during the time lag between their agreement to participate and the interview itself. Some participants turned 18 years old between Phase One and Phase Two of the interview. The age recorded in Table 1, “Demographic Information” (see page 92) reflects the age of participants at the time of the Phase One interview.

By age 14, young people have started to develop a sense of their own identity, and their peers become even more significant figures in their lives; by age 17, young people have neared the end of their formal schooling to embark on paths involving their own

choices, such as continuing education in university, or entering the workforce (Davies & Eynon, 2013). This age group is at a crucial life stage at which to study how young people think about their identities and behaviors as citizens or members of the community before they are eligible to vote (Haste, 2005). Research has demonstrated that community involvement, in the form of participation in extracurricular activities and volunteer work in secondary school, leads to positive youth development and later civic activity in adulthood (Flanagan, 2013; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Youniss & Levine, 2009; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997).

For this particular study sample, characteristics of interest include racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, as well as variation in technology use. To ensure maximum variation in the sample, I collected most data from school-based samples. Other participants were participants of after school programs to which I had previous professional connections. School attendance is compulsory for the age group in question, and therefore recruitment of participants through their schools would ensure that the sample will reflect a range of young people's experiences, and invite the possibility for students from a variety of backgrounds to have their voices heard. In schools, it was possible to recruit a mix of students from the age group of interest with diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and technology use.

I recruited most participants from schools in the cities of Cambridge and Boston, Massachusetts, serving students aged 14 through 17. My initial goal in this recruitment strategy was to ensure a high yield of participation agreements with traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools, and a total of 60 participating students from between three and six schools. I had hoped for at least 15 participants from each age group, 30 participants of each gender, and representation from a range of socioeconomic statuses and technological access. This sample size enabled me to conduct rich in-depth interviews with each participant. Appendix E contains brief descriptions of participants, including name, age, and brief observations about them.

### **3.3.2 Recruitment Process**

I began participant recruitment eight months prior to the study's first interview, and continued throughout the first phase of in-depth interviews to ensure theoretical

saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The way in which participants were then recruited varied by school/program, and will be described in detail in this section. I first contacted school and after-school program leaders in spring 2015 with information about the study via email and telephone call. I attended in-person meetings in spring, summer, and autumn 2015 with school leaders who expressed an interest in their students becoming participants in my study. Depending on the school, participants were then recruited by their school principals or myself in autumn 2015 or winter 2015. Students were directly given relevant participation information and consent documentation to share with parents/guardians.

The pilot interviews were conducted through a summer program with which I had previously conducted research. I used this professional connection to set up a meeting with students at this summer program, at which I made an announcement with information about my research and how to set up an interview. I successfully completed two pilot interviews with young people from this program, after several potential participants did not show up after scheduling the interview with me.

The first school that agreed to participate requested that I provide the Social Studies teachers with resources about my study and what participation would entail. This group of teachers then made announcements to their students requesting their voluntary participation in the study. As per school policy, students were instructed to have their consent forms signed, and then signed up for interviews with their teacher, who then informed me of the dates and times that students were available to meet with me. I successfully completed 16 interviews at this school.

The second recruitment group was from a politically oriented after school program to which I have professional connections. I was invited to attend this organization's autumn conference, where I made announcements and attempted to recruit students myself. Students volunteered to participate, and were given information letters to bring to their parents, but as per the program policy, did not need a signed consent form from their parent or guardian to participate in an interview. Students gave me their email addresses and I emailed each of them to coordinate a time. Only one student responded, and we conducted our interview over Skype.

The third recruitment group was a public school in a smaller school district in Massachusetts. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval from the school district, I made contact with two school leaders to discuss the study. After meeting, they suggested I return to the school to make announcements to their Learning Community (which represented 25% of the total school population, as the school is divided into four Learning Communities) by visiting each homeroom. As per the school policy, students interested in volunteering to participate were then instructed to have their consent form signed by a parent or guardian and then sign up to participate in an interview. After this initial set of announcements, only one student signed up to participate in an interview. I returned to the school several weeks later to make another set of announcements, and was able to interview ten students who volunteered to participate.

My final group of recruits was from another after school program, primarily serving students in disadvantaged circumstances. I collaborated with the Program Director to decide the best way to conduct interviews. The Program Director recommended that I attend the after school program every day for five hours for a one-week period, and she would encourage students to participate and send them to me to be interviewed in a private room. Students who then volunteered to participate were interviewed. I successfully completed 17 interviews at this program.

After completing the first round of 46 interviews, I moved toward the Phase Two interviews. The goal of the Phase Two interviews was to acquire more insight into young people's civic identity. To decide which participants to recruit for a second interview, I reflected on my experience with each individual participant, including the data, the dynamic and rapport between us, and the subsequent questions I wanted to ask. Overall, I selected participants for Phase Two interviews based on the level of insight they were able to share regarding civic identity formation, the underlying theme of the second research question. This sample of participants included young people with varying degrees of interest in politics and varying degrees of social media use. I opted to select several participants from each recruitment group/school, but omitted participants from the pilot interviews because of lack of communication. I also opted against reaching out to all participants, because some were rather hesitant to respond during the Phase One interview.

Challenges to longitudinal research include attrition, which I experienced throughout the data collection process (Grinyer & Thomas, 2012). I first contacted 18 participants for follow-up interviews, and decided to recruit more participants after many non-replies. Of the next round of recruitment emails, four students replied affirmatively. In total, I contacted 27 participants, mostly on the extremes of social media/technology use (high/low use) or political interest (high interest/low interest). I sent a recruitment email and text message to each of these participants, and had begun to conduct the Phase Two interviews with those who had responded indicating their willingness to participate. Overall, approximately half of the participants that I reached out to schedule a Phase Two interview responded, and not all of them participated in a Phase Two interview, due to scheduling conflicts and no-shows.

### ***Recruitment Challenges***

Miles and Huberman (1984) note, “samples in qualitative studies can change. Initial choices of informants lead to the recommendation of new informants; observing one class of events calls for a comparison with a different class” (p. 37). Significant challenges, including access, attrition, and interest from one gender group contributed to a change in the actual sample from the sample that I had set out to acquire for this study. When I first set out to conduct my fieldwork, I sought approval from a large urban school district to conduct interviews with students in five schools, whose school leaders agreed for their students to participate. However, the school district rejected my proposal, and I sought other avenues to recruit participants, such as recruiting from a smaller school district, recruiting from private schools, and recruiting from after school programs.

A second challenge throughout recruitment was attrition due to time lag. The lapse in time between the initial contact with potential participants, the participation agreement, and scheduling interviews proved difficult, as potential participants often forgot to attend the scheduled appointment for the interview. For some, interviews were scheduled within days of recruitment, whereas for others, school constraints on when interviews could be scheduled resulted in a lapse ranging from two weeks to two months before the interview could be scheduled and conducted. Furthermore, several

schools that agreed to participate when I first recruited them in March 2015 did not respond to future inquiries about arranging interviews with students.

The final major challenge to recruitment was the increased interest from females compared to males. As Brake (1985) notes, male researchers identify with male participants, and have therefore focused their research on the male participants. This concern applies to this study, but from the participant's point of view, rather than my perspective as the researcher, as I tried to appear "relatable" to all genders, by making eye contact with possible participants when I announced the opportunity to participate in my study, and by showing genuine interest at the same time. In the initial stages of recruitment, I received more interest from female recruits than male recruits. One possible explanation for this is my presence as a female researcher might have attracted female participants to talk to me, as they might have felt they could better relate to me than the male participants. Johnson and Rowlands (2012) have remarked, "It is difficult to generalize about the precise nature of the importance" (p. 104) of gender in interviewing. This challenge appeared after the completion of one-third of the Phase One interviews, and in subsequent recruitment at schools and after school programs, I addressed this issue with school and program leaders so that they could assist recruitment of males as well. Potter and Hepburn (2012) have noted that participants may be recruited based on specific characteristics, and at this stage of the research, I needed to recruit more male participants. As a way to address this challenge and incentivize participation from males, I offered Amazon vouchers<sup>5</sup> of \$10 per participant per interview, thereby making participation more desirable. In the final recruitment group, I opted to interview participants who were selected by their Program Director, rather than students who volunteered after hearing my announcement to invite participation. Students did have the opportunity to opt-out of participation, but no

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<sup>5</sup> In order to maintain equity and fairness to participants, I contacted participants from the previous Phase One interviews that I conducted without incentives to give them a \$10 Amazon voucher as a retroactive thank you gift for their participation. To thank the schools, programs, and staff with whom I coordinated many interviews, I offered a printed copy of my thesis to all participating schools/ programs, as well as an electronic version for the young people who wished to participate (as a cost-saving measure, rather than paying to print). I also offered to give back to the schools/programs however they saw fit, and one program requested that I deliver a brief presentation to all young people in their program (including those who did not participate in the study) about the purpose of my work, and what I have found interesting about the experience and findings to that point. This particular program emphasizes academic success in secondary school and university, and therefore the presentation also served as an opportunity for young people to ask questions about my educational experience and research experience as a potential career path for them to explore.

student elected to not participate. This helped to correct for the lack of male participation, and simultaneously increased diversity in racial and socioeconomic backgrounds represented in the study as it offered compensation to those participants who may not have otherwise missed the opportunity to work at their after school job. This also assured that I interviewed more students who would not otherwise have volunteered to participate in this research.

The final challenge – the gendered participant challenge – prompted me to inquire about the gendered stereotypes and wishes that society has placed on females and males in the last hundred years. Adolescents in today’s world are shaped by past views of those in their age group. In the educational setting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, boys and girls were segregated to guard the boys’ “masculinity and superiority” (Lesko, 2000, p. 185). Girls were oppressed, due to the thought that “girls would contribute to social degeneration, racial suicide, and imperial decline” (Lesko, 2000, p. 188). In today’s world, girls are told to fight and to speak up for themselves because sexism is so present in educational settings, the workplace, and everyday life. Perhaps this is a contributing factor to the larger proportion of study participants being female in this study: the female participants in this study must have wanted to make their voice heard, whereas males might have felt less inclined because their views are already heard. Because of girls’ desire to become involved, and the onset of feminist and gender equality understandings at younger ages (Kim & Ringrose, 2018), I expected gender to be a possible lens through which to analyze young people’s civic experiences. However, I did not achieve a gender split in the sample of participants as I had hoped (as evidenced in Table 1 on page 92), and found that both male and female participants shared similar civic experiences and concerns. For instance, Jackie (female) and Kenai (male) shared their frustration that adults had discouraged them from engaging politically, and Bibiana (female) and Joseph (male) experience a tension between a sense of belonging in the United States and a legal status of citizenship. As Chapters Four, Five, and Six will address, the civic experiences among the participants in this study related more to how adults treat them as “just kids” and the messages circulating in public discourse, particularly around immigration. The experiences that were discussed by participants in this study had no bearing on their gender, and therefore the uneven gender distribution did not impact the results of the study. However, given the social context of the growth of feminist societies in schools (Kim & Ringrose, 2018) and growing collectivized feminism in

public life (Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016), further research could be done into this area of gender identity and its relationship to civic identity and civic experiences.

### **3.3.3 Interview Process**

Like DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), I conceptualize interviews as guided conversations. This orientation toward the research method allowed me as the researcher to develop a positive rapport with each participant to establish a “safe and comfortable” environment for sharing the interviewee’s experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). The one-on-one interview, what DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) call the “in-depth” interview, is “meant to be a personal and intimate encounter in which open, direct verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories” (p. 317). I was able to delve deeply into the interview questions, which, in this study about civic identity, are inherently personal (Greene & Hill, 2005).

As Kvale (1996) noted, the “very virtue of qualitative interviews is their openness” (p. 84). Interviews permit subjects to orally express their own conceptions of their experiences and the world in which they live. Such a dialogue between the participant and researcher can uncover unexpected aspects of the phenomena studied (Kvale, 1996). Interviews with young people are a key method that researchers and others utilize to find out more about how young people understand and interpret their daily lives (Greene & Hill, 2005). I set out to engage in open and thoughtful conversations with each participant to discover their experiences and thoughts related to citizenship, civic engagement, and their position in contemporary society.

Kvale (1996) emphasizes that the interviewee’s responses are co-authored, rather than collected, in that the interviewer and the way he or she asks the questions plays a role in how the participant reflects and speaks their answer to the question, thereby co-creating the participant’s response. These co-created responses may be affected by certain dynamics of power in the interview setting that cannot be ignored, both between me as the researcher and the participants as interview subjects, and between me as an adult and the participants as children (Kvale, 1996). Throughout each interview, I was aware of power dynamics, and the contextual systems that make young people expect certain things to happen when a “teacher” type asks them a question (Cohen, Manion, &

Morrison, 2000; Greene & Hogan, 2005). While these power dynamics will likely always persist, I was determined to address them to minimize them in this study. For example, when participants revealed uncertainty, I reassured them that there are no right or wrong answers, and that I wanted to learn about *their* experiences, as Greene and Hogan (2005) recommend. Talmadge (2012) and Seidman (2013) note that when participants realize that what they have to say is important, and that they have value, they will be more comfortable in the interview. I aimed to achieve this level of rapport with each participant to ensure the most honest discussions. Furthermore, researching young people's experiences is inferential in nature, so I made sure to clarify with participants their responses if there was anything unclear that had been said (Greene & Hill, 2005).

Interviews are built on the expectation that there is an interviewer and a respondent, a time and place, and a series of questions (Warren, 2012). Indeed, the interviews that served as the data collection method for this study aligned with these expectations. At the start of each interview, I focused on the establishment of rapport, which continued throughout the interview. To establish rapport, I strived to achieve "mutual interest and interpersonal comfort" with the participant (Talmadge, 2012, p. 298). To do this, I sometimes disclosed personal details of my own life as a way to relate to participants (Rapley, 2012). For example, Addie, who seemed shy at first, revealed to me that she participates on the fencing team at her school. When I was in secondary school and university, I participated on the fencing team as well. I shared this information with my participant, and our interaction became much warmer, and she opened herself up more to me than she had at the start of the conversation. This process was not always successful with the more timid participants – some individuals simply did not wish to share many details during the interview, despite my efforts to relate to participants and pose thoughtful probing questions.

The research questions that are the focus of this study guided and informed the interview questions, and served as the core structure upon which the interview schedule was based. I used the same interview schedule to ensure it possible to compare interview subjects, "build theory, and improve predictions" later on (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 43). Following the establishment of rapport, interview questions were more general, and were then followed by more specific probes (Charmaz &

Belgrave, 2012). For example, to address the concept of civic identity, I first asked each participant, “tell me about yourself” at the start of each interview to help participants differentiate themselves from others. Later in the interview, I inquired, “do you feel like you’re a member of a community?” and “what does ‘citizenship’ mean to you?” to enable participants to situate themselves and their identity within a community. Moreover, my investigation is centered on the concept of civic identity, so I set out to learn about how young people interpret citizenship, civic engagement, and community membership. As Bennett (2008) acknowledges, “the entire question of civic engagement is confounded by how one chooses to define citizenship itself” (p. 8). For this reason, I first invited conversation about citizenship with the participants before delving into the topics of technology use and civic engagement. Because definitions of civic engagement vary widely, I put forth two widely accepted definitions and allowed young people to describe what civic engagement meant to them personally: one broad, the other specifically focused on digital engagement. After the participant considered both definitions of civic engagement, he or she was asked “Which definition of civic engagement do you think fits the most with how you think about the idea?” As Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths (2018) address, the involvement of young people in choosing and explaining their own definitions is crucial to social research. Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths (2018) share that it is “not sufficient” for the researcher to offer a definition, but it is also not sufficient to use that definition with the population being studied. Therefore, I opted to allow each participant’s preferred definition of civic engagement to frame the interview. Appendix B contains the interview schedule for Phase One. In both Phases One and Two, participants had the opportunity to show me what they do online and on social media on their phones or laptops, if they wished.

The study began with two pilot interviews, after which I refined the interview schedule (see Appendix A for Pilot Interview Schedule; Appendix B for Phase One Interview Schedule). The pilot interviews were conducted in summer 2015 as a way to assess the appropriateness of the questions designed in the interview schedule for Phase One. After two pilot interviews, the themes that guided the interview were assessed to be appropriate for the inquiry into the identity, civic identity, and experiences with technology of the young people to be studied. Slight modifications to the questions were made before Phase One. For example, in the pilot interviews, when I asked about the participants’ sense of community membership, I did not delve deep into community

involvement and local community events, and focused more on participants' interactions with friends. After the pilot interviews, I recognized the value of adding several more questions about the participant's involvement in and awareness of local community and political events, as this would be an important inquiry into their civic experiences, and added these questions in the "Community" them of the Phase One interview schedule.

Upon transcribing the Phase One interview recordings throughout the data collection process, I determined that the data was theoretically saturated, but lacking in deep inquiry about the participants' past experiences of citizenship. I recognized additional questions that I must ask of participants to explore civic identity formation and expression in more depth, and determined that a second phase of interviews with a subset of participants would allow me the opportunity to go further and in-depth about certain topics, especially civic identity (Grinyer & Thomas, 2012). I devised a set of follow-up questions for Phase Two (See Appendix C), and recruited participants for a follow-up interview.

Phase Two occurred in the late spring and early summer of 2016, several months after Phase One, and the interviews provided rich data in the area of interest. By this point in the study, I had established a rapport with the participants who were available to partake in a second interview. Because of this established rapport, the participants felt comfortable sharing more details of the personal experiences that led to their beliefs and understandings about what it means to be a citizen and what it means to be civically engaged. For example, Sean shyly expressed interest in the broader aims of my research during Phase One, but opened up to me in Phase Two, when he shared the tensions and frustrations he experienced with the administration at his high school, who he said claimed to encourage students to have a voice in school policies, but in reality created policies based on adult input.

I employed strategic reflexivity throughout the interview process, reflecting critically about the research aims, methods, and approach to the research to recognize when I needed to make adaptations to the methodology (Finlay, 2012). The nature of qualitative data analysis allowed me to reflect and refine the research questions and explore these ideas in greater depth throughout the study (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). I revised

and added new questions in the interview protocol between each interview, so that the interview that followed would be informed by the experience of the previous interview (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

After interviewing 46 participants, I had achieved a strong sample of participants from each demographic group of interest (males and females, racial groups, socioeconomic status, and school types), and at that point I found that participants' statements and views were overlapping: the data was theoretically saturated (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). As Beitin (2012) notes, there is no optimal sample size in qualitative research, and "theoretical saturation is becoming the most common approach to sample size" (p. 244). Table 1 illustrates demographic information, and compares the sample to the averages across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the state in which the study took place. Prior research has included a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse sample of students, and this study sought a similarly diverse sample so as to follow best practices. Participants were chosen for their relevance to the research questions (Schwandt, 2007).

Rather than making claims of representativeness in this study, Table 1 provides a context for the study. Different regions in the United States of America have different distributions of race and wealth. For example, southern states, like New Mexico and California, tend to have a greater Hispanic and Latino population, and greater African American/ Black population than the northeast, where Massachusetts is situated (United States Census Bureau, 2011). The variation in the actual sample from the state averages infers that the urban area where the study took place is not entirely representative of the state, or northeast region, as a whole, but provides a context for understanding the experiences of young people in the study. The civic experiences of young people may be influenced by their background, as different groups of people are likely to have different experiences, particularly in consideration of race in individuals' lived experiences (Garcia, Sanchez, Sanchez-Youngman, Vargas, & Ybarra, 2015). A recent report from the Pew Research Center indicates a difference in perceptions on race and opportunity in the United States (Parker, Horowitz, & Mahl, 2016). Notably, African American/ Black individuals tend to be more disadvantaged, with Blacks more than twice as likely as whites to be living in poverty (Parker, Horowitz, & Mahl, 2016). Blacks experience failing schools, racial discrimination, and fewer job opportunities

(Parker, Horowitz, & Mahl, 2016), which influences their opportunities to improve their livelihoods and engage civically. Kahne and Middaugh (2009) found that African American/ Black students experienced fewer civic-oriented government classes and discussions about current events, compounding this civic empowerment gap (Levinson, 2010), as addressed in Section 2.5.

The lived experiences of the participants influenced the issues of public concern that participants said mattered to them. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement and issue of police brutality against black males was an important issue of public concern for the participants, particularly those who identified as African American/ Black. As noted in Table 1, there is a higher proportion of African American/ Black participants in this study compared to public schools across Massachusetts, which may explain why the Black Lives Matter issue was so prevalent. Overall, the sample of participants demonstrates a range of backgrounds and experiences of the young people living in the Cambridge and Boston area. It can be inferred that young people in other parts of the state may have experiences different from those in the urban areas, as their communities are comprised of different backgrounds and lived experiences.

Following theoretical saturation, I set out to devise an interview schedule for Phase Two to home in on some key themes that had arisen after Phase One. I customized the interview questions for each of the ten participants in Phase Two – the questions were the same, but I incorporated the participants' own definitions for topics such as community and active citizenship.

		<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage of Participants</b>	<b>State Averages*</b>
<b><u>Age</u></b>	<i>14</i>	10	22%	-
	<i>15</i>	15	33%	-
	<i>16</i>	13	28%	-
	<i>17</i>	6	13%	-
	<i>18</i>	2	4%	-
<b><u>Gender</u></b>	<i>Female</i>	32	70%	49%
	<i>Male</i>	14	30%	51%
<b><u>Race</u></b>	<i>African American/Black</i>	17	30%	8%
	<i>Biracial/Multiracial</i>	2	4%	3%
	<i>White/European / Caucasian Americans</i>	18	39%	67%
	<i>Hispanic/Latino/ Latina</i>	3	7%	16%
	<i>Asian American</i>	4	9%	6%
	<i>Other</i>	2	4%	-
<b><u>School Type</u></b>	<i>Public</i>	27	59%	-
	<i>Private</i>	17	37%	-
	<i>Unknown</i>	2	4%	-
<b><u>Total Number of Participants</u></b>		46	100%	-

**Table 1: Demographic Information.** “-” indicates where data was unavailable.

\*State averages include data from public schools only (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Phase Two interviews took place in person or via video chat (i.e., FaceTime or Skype), whichever method was easiest for the participant. I wanted to be sensitive to the participants’ needs and schedules as a way to better encourage their participation. James and Busher (2012) advise researchers to establish relationships with their participants before engaging in the research, so, prior to suggesting to participants that we conduct the interview through a video chat platform, I ensured that I already had established a rapport with the participant through a Phase One interview. I had met each participant in person for the Phase One interview – with the exception of Elsie, who I had met in person before conducting her Phase One interview via Skype – before interviewing them via video chat. This ensured that we still operated within the social frameworks of a face-to-face encounter, so that participants wouldn’t “distort or disguise” themselves

by hiding behind the screen (James & Busher, 2012, p. 181). All participants received a \$10 Amazon gift card for their participation in each interview.

### **3.3.4 Authenticity of Findings**

One of Tracy's (2010) eight "big tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research is that findings must be authentic enough to act on their implications. I sought to obtain authentic findings by maintaining equal levels of anonymity between myself and all participants by only interviewing participants who I did not know in advance of the study (Seidman, 2013), and making the interview setting as organic and private as possible. I also took efforts to encourage participants to recall and retell their experiences to the best of their abilities.

#### ***Interview Setting and Power Dynamics***

Interview sites and locations carry meaning and create power dynamics (Elwood & Martin, 2004). Cook (2012) notes that interviews can be seen as forced and unnatural social situations, comprised of one person with more control over the situation (the interviewer) than the other (the participant). I did my best to limit the sense of an imbalance of power and I sought interview settings that would foster a natural conversation, with the notion that formal physical interview settings provide for fewer interruptions (Talmage, 2012). Because young people were recruited to participate through their school, and I wanted to facilitate their ability to attend the interview, I collaborated with school administrators to ensure that the participants could easily access the interview setting. The interviews had to be conducted within the constraints of schools and the sociopolitical institutions within the schools and programs through which I recruited participants. Due to such constraints – and power structures they imply – it was important to consider all options for interview locations within the school setting, including the classrooms, meeting rooms, the school library, or the faculty office.

I am unable to determine whether those interviews that occurred in faculty offices made young people feel more shy or inhibited at first, as I did not notice whether participants seemed to be holding back more in that context – they seemed just as comfortable talking about their school there as they were outside of school. In the Phase Two

interviews, I gave participants a choice to meet in person or participate in the interview via video chat. It was important to give them the option to decide what would be most convenient for them as an effort to facilitate their participation. As Phase Two interviews were conducted in the spring and summer, I offered participants the option to conduct the interview outdoors. Two participants who I had previously interviewed in a faculty office participated in Phase Two interviews outdoors on a picnic bench. They spoke openly about their frustrations with the school administration when we were outside of the building, but I cannot fully attribute this sharing of frustrations to the interview location itself. As these revelations occurred in Phase Two, it may have happened such that participants felt a stronger rapport with me as the interviewer during this second meeting, and therefore a greater sense of trust in me with this information (Grinyer & Thomas, 2012). Herzog (2012) claims that it is not the setting per se but rather the interaction between the interviewer and participant that makes meaning to the location of the interview.

### ***Participant Retelling of Past Events***

This research required inquiry regarding past thoughts, behaviors, and experiences. Breakwell, Hammond, Fife-Schaw, and Smith (2006) argue that such memories cannot be counted on for accuracy. While I did not assume that participants have retained a perfectly accurate memory of the events they describe (i.e., their first memory of talking about politics, their first memory of using technology), I believe that these memories reflect each participant's personal experience. While these might not be accurate memories of every event, the memories themselves are informative, and enable a better understanding of each participant. The retelling of the experience is more important than the accuracy of the recall. For example, Tanesha remembers: "I hadn't known that [Barack Obama] was the first African-American President until my mom told me. So I was just like, 'What does that mean, is that breaking a barrier, cause it's the first time its ever been done.' So the next week or so, I was talking to my cousin about a book about Michelle Obama. So I read it, and I was like, 'Woah, this is big.'" It is not important that Tanesha remembered exactly *when* she had this discussion with her mother, or read the book about Michelle Obama, but it is important that the 2008 presidential election, and Tanesha's realization that Barack Obama was the first African-American president, was important to her and her civic identity. As a young black woman, this memory

resonated with Tanesha. Tanesha shared that “my ancestors themselves were slaves,” and having a United States President and First Lady that had a shared cultural history shaped how Tanesha admires that Mr. and Mrs. Obama broke a racial “barrier” in American society.

My interpretivist approach to this research allowed me to be a “traveller” in Kvale’s (2007) metaphor of an interviewer. Instead of “mining” for knowledge and accurate recall among the participants, like a miner searching for precious metal, I “travelled” on a journey with participants through the past experiences that were formative in their civic identity development, returning “home” to writing the stories of their lived experiences in this thesis. The interview itself and analysis of the interview are linked phases of knowledge construction (Kvale, *Epistemological Issues of Interviewing*, 2007), and it is this emphasis on the narrative that makes the meaning of the experiences they share more important than the accuracy of participants’ recall. I found that some participants experienced difficulty in recalling specific thoughts they had or behaviors they exhibited when they engaged in discussions online, or what they observed in online discussions. For this reason, I also asked participants to supplement their answers by showing me a concrete example of their online actions if it was available, but only one participant elected to do this.

### **3.4 Qualitative Data Analysis**

#### **3.4.1 Data Management**

Johnson and Rowlands (2012) argue, “field notes are far inferior to audio recording for in-depth interviews” (p. 106). Dey (1993) highlights the importance that data are recorded “as spoken” (p. 15). To best manage all of the data I collected, I followed these recommendations and audio-recorded each interview using a digital voice recorder, and uploaded the audio files to my computer immediately after each interview. The files were saved to my password-protected computer in a file under a shorthand version of the school name, a chronological interview number, and date. At the conclusion of each Phase One interview, I collected demographic data from each participant (see Table 1 for Demographic Information). I recorded the demographic data in an Excel spreadsheet, one row per subject, attached to the subject ID. This Excel file was later

imported into NVivo, the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software that facilitated the data analysis.

Throughout data collection, I kept my field notes in stenographer's notebooks (printed questions on one side and notes on the other side). I keep original copies of the demographic surveys, consent forms, interview calendar, and gift card receipts filed in a binder stored securely in my locked home office. On the printed interview calendar, I recorded the subject's interview ID next to his or her name, and I put a star next to the participants I considered for a Phase Two interview. When I transcribed the interviews, I saved each interview transcription with the participant ID number I assigned at our first meeting in a folder marked "interview transcripts" in the hierarchical file system on my computer, as recommended by Dey (1993).

### **3.4.2 Data Analysis Methods**

Dey (1993) notes that the core of qualitative data analysis is describing phenomena, classifying them, and seeing how the concepts interconnect. I employed an iterative data analysis process for this study, beginning with the field notes and transcriptions following each interview, and subsequently coding each transcript before moving into a method of analysis through writing.

Verbatim transcriptions are the most common type of transcription (Rapley, 2012). I chose to employ verbatim transcription, and transcribed all of the interviews myself – rather than outsourcing, or using a voice-to-text software program – as a way to better understand my participants, their thoughts, and their experiences. After I transcribed each interview, I reviewed the transcripts to identify themes and patterns in this "template approach," in which I applied prior research and theory to the emerging themes of the current study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This systematic data analysis and theory development developed throughout the fieldwork research stage and continued through coding and writing participant vignettes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strategies for developing the theories that emerged from my data included making notes and observations after every discussion or reading related to this research, as well as noting patterns and themes in the data, coding those themes, and linking them together

to build a cohesive conceptual framework (Dunleavy, 2003; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

### ***Coding***

The coding process helps to identify all content that is related to a theme in the data (Gibbs, 2014). Each code is a category where data can be placed, and will be valid, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I coded the data as a way to aggregate the data and facilitate the development of new ways of thinking about the data (Richards, 2005). Coding began with hand-drawn histograms of characteristics that emerged as important throughout the first 29 interviews, related to the questions from which the research developed (Dey, 1993). These characteristics are: age, ethnicity, mother's education, father's education, participant's interest in politics, people with whom the participant discusses politics/current events, participant's civic awareness, where participant gets news, type of technology used most often, and gender. Each code captured a "word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3).

I continued with a process of open coding, in which I thoroughly read all data as it relates to the research question, and then assigned a relevant code (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). As codes were developed, I utilized the computer-based qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to create analytic memos and annotations to save the definitions of the codes and possible conjectures about their implications, thereby informing the theory I began to develop through this work (Gibbs, 2014; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). I applied simultaneous coding – more than one code applied to the same datum – to detail the complexity and potential multiple meanings of the data in context with other codes and, later, themes (Saldaña, 2013). I also utilized focused coding and grouped codes together based on thematic or conceptual similarity (Saldaña, 2013).

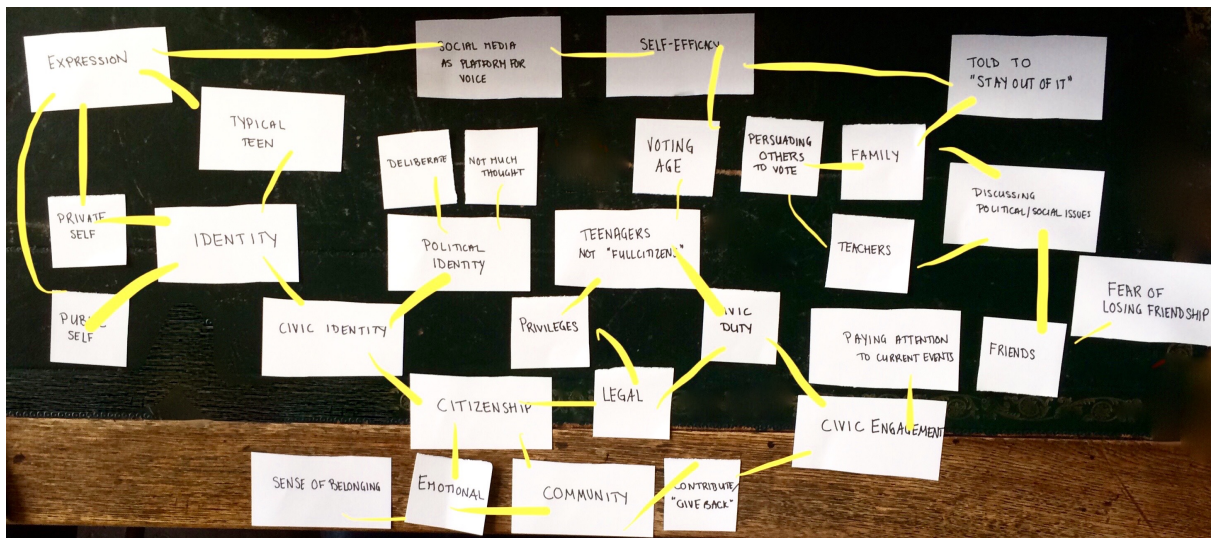
Throughout the next phases of coding, I continued to use NVivo. Following Saldaña's (2013) recommendation to code participant data one participant at a time, I carefully and thoroughly read each interview transcript and assigned codes pertaining to each

research question. As I coded each transcript, I also created annotations in both NVivo and my field notes as a way to add new reflections to the data analysis (Richards, 2005, p. 69). I chose to highlight ideas and participant quotes that seemed unique to this field of research (Richards, 2005, p. 70). After the first, more general phase of coding was complete, I employed axial coding and reviewed each code and created sub-codes, if necessary.

### ***Participant Vignettes***

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that the researcher look for patterns in the data as a way to derive explanations for trends in the data. Such a process lends itself well to the iterative process of identifying categories as they emerge from the data (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). Writing case studies for a small sample of the data can serve as a strategy to facilitate the development of a thematic framework through which to think about the rest of the data and develop theory based on the findings that emerged from the data (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000).

In this particular study, there were six participants with whom I had conversations that were particularly memorable: some had shared stories or experiences that seemed particularly noteworthy, and others shared many personal details and beliefs with me. I decided that for each of these six participants, I would write a participant vignette, based on the aforementioned case study strategy, which would help me to construct a narrative to better understand each of these six participants by thoroughly reviewing their interview transcripts. While writing these case studies (see Appendices F, G, H, I, J, and K), I reflected on the three research questions and found within participant's responses many emerging themes relevant to the research questions, which I documented as a mind map. These themes are presented in Figure 3 below, which demonstrates how the themes relate to each other.



**Figure 3: Mind Map of Emerging Themes from the Data.**

As these themes emerged within and across each participant vignette, I referred back to my coding scheme in NVivo and noticed that the codes I initially created were directly related to these emerging themes and the research questions. This process enabled me to look at correlations between themes, and reassess them as they correlate between other themes (Dey, 1993). I synthesized these findings and themes in tandem with consulting literature in each area, and developed a structure for the way in which I would reveal the study’s findings in this thesis.

### 3.4.3 Ethical Considerations

While this study posed no risk to participants or participating schools and programs, I considered the process of consent, confidentiality, and consequences for participants in the design of this study (Kvale, 1996). The primary issues of concern were fourfold: 1) the treatment of schoolchildren as interview subjects, 2) the discussion of personal identity and digital media use, 3) the potential discussion of participants’ peers or other individuals with whom teenagers interact online who may not have provided consent to participate in this particular study, and 4) paying interview subjects for their participation. Ethical principles related to the selection and participation of schoolchildren in this study include adhering to the BERA (2011) legal requirements in working with schoolchildren, subjects’ informed consent and privacy (Kvale, 1996), and reporting any suspicion of abuse or danger that participants might mention in the interview (Office of Essex County District Attorney, 2005). None of the participants in

this study disclosed information about their peers who may not have given consent to participate in the study, but I was prepared to consult the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) guidelines to determine whether to exclude that information from the transcripts and final report, should it have arisen (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

Informed consent “safeguards values” of privacy and autonomy (Marzano, 2012, p. 445). In accordance with the University of Oxford’s protocols for research with children in schools, introductory materials regarding the purpose of the study and participant information forms were presented to principals, teachers, parents, and students in the participating recruitment pools. To obtain informed consent for the student to participate, the study was described to parents and students, highlighting that student participation was voluntary, and a way to investigate young people’s social media use, civic engagement, and civil discourse. In accordance with University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee’s (CUREC) Protocol 25, the recruitment documents (sent in print and via email) also included an opt-out form to be signed by the parent/guardian should the young person not want to participate in the study, or should the parent not wish to allow his or her child to participate. At the interview appointment, participants were given the explicit opportunity to decline participation before the interview began, and the assurance that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Prior to participation, participants were also reminded that their participation would be confidential at all stages. However, I made participants aware that if sensitive disclosures about abuse, neglect, or other harm they have experienced arise in the interview, then I was obligated to report that to their school principal or teacher, who are mandated reporters and can take the appropriate course of action with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services. Before the interview began, I also verbally reminded participants of this. Throughout the interviews, no participant came forward with any such information, and I therefore did not need to report any confidential information to the appropriate bodies. Documentation from the ethics approval process can be found in Appendix L.

It is important to protect the identities of study participants “at every stage of the research” (Kaiser, 2012, p. 459). Confidentiality was maintained primarily through the assignment of ID numbers (Heggen & Guillemin, 2012). During data collection, I assigned each participant an ID number by which I would refer to them throughout the

remainder of the study until I assigned them a pseudonym using the “Find and Replace” feature on text-based software. As this effort may not be enough, changing characteristics of individuals was necessary in some cases as a way to remove identifying information from the final report (Kaiser, 2012). Once data collection was complete, I maintained confidentiality in the transcriptions by remaining the only person to transcribe and consistently use the same ID numbers for each participant so that the names of the students and their schools could not be identified on the transcripts or in the final report. The audio files for the interviews and the transcriptions are stored on my own personal, password-protected computer, as approved by CUREC.

Paying interview subjects for their participation has been a widely-scrutinized practice by ethical review boards, because the data can be seen as more authentic if the participant wants to partake in the research for the sake of sharing his or her own story (Cook, 2012). I successfully acquired participation agreements from 19 young people who were eager to participate. As I discussed previously, it was a great challenge to recruit participants from lower socioeconomic strata, as many had jobs after school and did not want to participate in this research because it would have taken away from their paid working hours. It felt important – and just – to provide some form of payment to these participants, as their voices are critical to the research. I determined that a modest payment of a \$10 Amazon gift voucher per interview was appropriate as an effort to recruit participants for the study. By incentivising participation, I better created a sample of young people, particularly those from underrepresented socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups.

## Chapter Four | Findings

# Presentations of the Adolescent Self in Contemporary Society

“Tell me a little bit about yourself.” I began each interview with this open-ended statement; I intended to invite an open discussion about each participant’s own unique experiences as a young person in today’s world. I sought to learn what factors influence each participant’s identity, and the aspects of themselves they chose to share with me in the interview setting. This chapter addresses the first research question that motivated this study.

It can be difficult to describe oneself in a few minutes during an extended interview, and it is especially challenging to ask young people to talk about themselves, particularly because adolescence is a critical time during which identity is fluid (Erikson, 1968). Martin, a humble 15-year-old, found it difficult to talk about himself when asked. Martin said that he prefers to *not* talk about himself. He shared that his mother, grandparents, and uncles taught him “morals and to be selfless” and to treat others as he would want to be treated. While Martin struggled to describe himself because he dislikes talking about himself, other young people struggle to describe themselves as they are still discovering whom they are. In my first conversation with Tanesha, aged 16, Tanesha said, “I don’t know who I am” and that she does not like putting herself “into a box, because if I set a box, then I feel like that’s trying to force myself into it...I feel like I don’t know who I am exactly yet. I’m still growing. I’m only 16.” Tanesha expressed her desire for freedom to discover herself, and express herself as she gets older. Madeline, aged 17, echoed this acknowledgement of personal development when she said, “I’m still trying to figure out who I am.”

Erikson's (1968) theory of identity formation in adolescence is a valuable framework to understanding identity development in contemporary society, and how it is that young people "figure out" who they are, and who they want to be. Erikson's (1968) theory was a significant contribution to the work of psychologists throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and researchers studying adolescents in contemporary society have found it applicable today (Davis & Weinstein, 2017). While Erikson (1968) asserts that identity formation is a lifelong process, it is central to the development of adolescents, who experience a conflict between identity synthesis and identity confusion, suspended in a psychosocial moratorium, during which adolescents try on different identities (Erikson, 1968). This paradigm of identity synthesis versus identity confusion shows that the stronger one's sense of identity synthesis, the more aware he/she/they are of his/her/their own uniqueness, strengths, and weaknesses (Luyckx, Gandhi, Bijttebier, & Claes, 2015). In practice, the psychosocial moratorium stage of development involves creating and testing out new identities through varying means of self-expression. In contemporary society, social media provide many opportunities for creating and exploring different identities: selfies on Instagram and Snapchat and status updates on Facebook are just a few modern ways of expressing oneself (Davis & Weinstein, 2017). Different circumstances and settings require individuals to present different aspects of themselves, and express themselves in different ways (Erikson, 1968). Theorists Goffman (1959) and Schlenker (1986) provide a deeper insight into these distinctions, and will be addressed in Section 4.2.

This chapter presents findings for the first research question in this study: *In what ways do young people, ages 14 through 17, present themselves to others in contemporary society?* Young people establish connections to others, and sometimes distinguish between a public and private self, which influences the ways in which they like to express themselves. These factors will be addressed throughout this chapter to help explain what it means to be a typical teenager in today's world, and will provide the scaffolding of identity that supports civic identity, which will be addressed in Chapter Five. The presentations of the self that are presented in this chapter may influence how young people engage in the political world, which will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

## 4.1 Connection to Others

Adolescents are experiencing a life stage in which they are beginning to develop and understand their sense of self, which is influenced by a multitude of factors, including their relationship to others, and how they experience those relationships in digitally mediated ways. I sought to understand each participant's unique view of him or herself, and to inquire about these distinctive identities, I asked each participant to describe themselves, the activities they enjoy doing, and their other likes and interests. I found that the young people in this study often describe and present themselves in relation and connection to others, whether in relation to a school, sports team, country of origin, or position in the family. This section details these findings.

At age 14, many young people describe themselves through their likes and interests – often involving their extracurricular or sports activities outside of school. For example, Jane, a newcomer to her school, introduced herself to me by saying, “My name is Jane, I’m 14... I play softball, soccer, volleyball, basketball.” Participation in sports teams is common among American young people during their high school years. Often, parents and teachers encourage young people to participate as a way to build leadership skills, exercise, and make new friends. It is very common for these high school sports teams and extracurricular groups to have their own Facebook pages and groups, so members and supporters can Follow and be aware of the next match or team dinner, and other events happening in the group. Imani, also aged 14, just started high school, does “a lot programs, so I know a lot of people.” Imani demonstrates her membership to her cohort by referring to the group as “we” – and speaking on the collective behalf of the group, she explains that everyone is “connected,” and experiencing the transition to high school. Imani is involved in many programs, and interacts with groups of different people, allowing her to not feel like a stranger in her large high school. Imani and other participants discussed their membership in their sports team or after school club Facebook pages, where they interact with other members of those groups and find out about upcoming sports matches and events. This sense of knowing others and feeling connected and supported on teams or in school groups can be reassuring. For some, it is easy to identify this support as a positive influence on one's life: Damon – a very hardworking, determined 14-year-old – says that his family and friends have shaped his identity because “everybody wants to support me and help me become successful in

life.” At age 14, young people are at the start of adolescence, and are just beginning to understand themselves and how the people around them might impact their lives.

This importance of connection to others through shared interests carries through adolescence, though development of the self through activities and hobbies seems to be equally important. Many 15-year-old participants in this study described themselves through their hobbies: Camille describes herself as outgoing and ambitious, and likes drawing and painting; Aidan prefers “hands on” activities and enjoys playing on the soccer team and his engineering classes. Demonstrating a small shift from the 14-year-old participants in this study, several 15-year-olds in this study described themselves more independently, rather than as a factor of their group affiliations. Sawyer describes himself as “determined,” and when he puts his “mind to something,” he will work until the project is finished. Similarly, Selah puts “a lot of effort into school” and is “hardworking.” In the United States, it is around age 15 and 16, when young people are in their second and third year of high school, that students tend to become more serious about academics in preparation for the competitive undergraduate admissions process. Camille, Sawyer, and Selah all alluded to their perseverance and hardworking nature, perhaps reflective of this competitive time in their lives.

Around ages 16 and 17, individuals’ conceptions of themselves become more complex, and qualified with personal values and philosophies related to connection with others – especially family and community. For example, Kali describes herself, as “funny, goofy... I like to have a fun time ... I try to be optimistic and uplifting” and doesn’t want to be “serious all the time.” Kali considers herself to be a “respectful person: we all come from different walks of life, so I can’t tell somebody how to live their life, nobody can tell me how to live mine. And just, respecting where people come from, that’s what you need to do in this life to get anywhere.” Kali exhibits some of her personal values, philosophy, and understanding of the world around her in her description of herself, compared to the younger participants in this study. She highlights her compassion for others and reflected on where this comes from. Kali shared that her younger sister was shot and paralyzed at age 3, and their mother started a not-for-profit organization that focuses on “outreach for victims of violence.” Kali has been strongly influenced by her own life experience living in what she refers to as “the inner city,” and how her mother has coped with difficult situations. She feels a strong connection to

her peers in the summer program that served as a recruitment pool and backdrop for our interview: all of the young people in the program share the same “inner city” background, and “don’t have all of the materials that we need.” This academic summer program offers scholarships to students every summer for 3 years, and if they successfully complete the 3-year program, they are awarded \$3,000 in scholarship funds to use toward their education at a college or university of their choice. Kali, evidently, feels humbled to be in this program, and senses a bond with her peers in the group because of their shared background.

Similarly, while Habibah, aged 16, defines herself and her individuality in relation to her family as the “youngest of eight” children, when it comes to other people, she has a desire to keep a small group of friends, rather than a large group, because “if you have a big group of friends, they usually end up betraying you.” I did not press on this issue, as social dynamics and interpersonal relationships among young people in the high school years can be fraught with drama and misunderstanding, yielding many to unfortunately feel “betrayed,” as Habibah discussed. I did not wish to strike a nerve by delving into this idea of betrayal, sensing that Habibah herself had experienced a hurtful instance of this nature. Interestingly, Peter, aged 17, described himself as “trustworthy” and highlights this quality of himself with what he views as a responsible job working in a preschool: he has “a lot of responsibility” and ensures that the children “don’t get injured or anything.” But, not all 16- and 17-year-olds hold these views, or choose to describe themselves while hinting at their values. Some continue the trend of describing themselves based on their sports teams or extracurricular activities and interests like the 14- and 15-year-olds in this study. This signifies that while young people see and describe themselves in different ways at different ages, age does not necessarily mark a specific stage in identity development. Identity development is unique to each individual, and goes beyond connecting to others through shared likes and interests with peers. While this connection is indeed a social mechanism through which one is able to gain an understanding of oneself and how one chooses to present aspects of the self to others, it is because of these connections that young people share certain likes and interests. The following section will describe the distinction between the public self and private self, as experienced by the teenagers in this study.

## 4.2 Private vs. Public Self

Identity can be seen as a social process, dependent on the situation and perceived audience: we choose what pieces of ourselves to present to the world, and with whom to share those pieces (boyd, 2007b). Young people do think about how others view them, and how they represent themselves to others – a public self. In adolescence, young people begin to make the distinction between the private self and the public self, known only to each individual, and maybe to a select few close family and friends. This distinction can sometimes be explored using social media, and sometimes later manifests itself in one's decision to share one's civic identity and discuss political and social issues with others, such as friends, family, teachers, which will be discussed in Chapter Six. The findings presented in the following section draw on social interaction theory: how identities are constructed through relations to and interactions with others (Goffman, 1978).

To understand the distinctions between the private self and public self, it is helpful to look deeper into theories of identity in addition to Erikson (1968): Barry Schlenker's (1986; 2012) work on identity and presentation of the self, and Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of the self, first presented in Chapter Two. The private self is the "core of one's inner being" (Schlenker, 1986, p. 21). The private self is one's inner thoughts, feelings, desires, and beliefs. The private self is sometimes – but not always – revealed. The public self is whom we display in social settings (Schlenker, 1986). Only a single person can know when his or her own private self is reflected in the public self. While Goffman (1959) does not assert that there is a true self, because each person plays different roles different social settings, from the data it is clear that individuals do make distinctions in what aspects of the self they wish to share with others, privately or publicly, and this theory is apparent in this study.

It is not uncommon to make a distinction between the private self and the public self, whether this decision to make the distinction is conscious or not. For the young people in this study, many decisions about how to present themselves to the world could be easily articulated, and often demonstrated a connection to an audience. Audiences for young people could be parents, siblings, teachers, friends, and even strangers. These audiences represent the many opportunities for young people to share certain aspects of

the self to others. Young people choose to share aspects of themselves and their identities in different ways, depending on their audience, and negotiate their displays of self for the benefit of themselves and others.

Outside of school, Laura, aged 17, is very active in Live Action Role Play (LARP), which she describes as “you hit each other with foam swords but it also has role playing in it so it’s also acting.” While Laura enjoys this, and explained LARP animatedly after I asked her to tell me about herself, she explained that she “dropped out because it’s kind of a nerdy thing,” and she “did not really want [LARP] to be what I was known for.” Although Laura presented herself as a leader, discussing her role in her community as “LARP Mom,” she distances herself from this “nerdy” community at her school, as an effort to protect herself from bullying.

In public, 15-year-old Kevin expresses himself as a cheerful person who likes to crack jokes. During our interview, when I asked if there is anyone he looks up to as a role model, he replied, “Um, actually there are a lot of people I really do look up to kinda, because I’m short.” I could not help but indulge Kevin and myself in a laugh. I was surprised when Kevin also described his “darker” side that he keeps to himself because “I don’t want people in the world to feel bad because I feel bad.” Kevin chooses to share private aspects of himself on *some* public platforms, like his Facebook profile – but not all. Interestingly, Kevin feels comfortable showing both his “lighthearted” and “emotional” sides on social media, and says that his social media profiles represent him “to a T.” Kevin chooses to present his cheerful self, but preserve his darker self simultaneously – it appears that he wishes to protect other’s feelings, and their possible worries about his wellbeing.

Bethany, aged 16, shares her public self in a similar manner to Kevin, though does not believe that her social media profiles are accurate representations of who she is. Bethany only puts “out there what I want people to see. I can’t really show them all of me. My posts are usually fun and funny, because I don’t... want to put like, emotional stuff out there.” Bethany acknowledges her decision to always withhold her “emotional” side from others, whereas Kevin shares that he censors his “darker” emotions on social media just some of the time. Interestingly, both Kevin and Bethany presented to me as enthusiastic, positive individuals, yet revealed to me through our conversation that they

also have “darker” sides. Bethany highlighted the reason for this difference: “I don’t want to sound like sappy and like a weak person. So I usually don’t say what I’m feeling, if I’m feeling sad.” Bethany is worried that “people will portray me different” than how she wishes to be perceived. Kevin will share his emotional side “rarely,” but as that is part of who he is, he will not hide it (even if he tries). Kevin and Bethany illustrate that some young people wish to keep their emotional sides closer to the chest, and not share them outwardly. As Schlenker (2012) observes, people want others to see themselves in a positive light, or in ways that confirm how they see themselves, which leads people to present themselves in ways that give self-verifying feedback. When young people like Kevin say that their social media profiles are an accurate representation of the self, it is evident that social media is a very public way for their friends to confirm whether they are seeing them in the same way they see themselves.

As the methodology for this study did not call for observations of young people in their daily life, for the purposes of this study, the distinctions between the private and public selves are apparent through the ways in which young people present themselves on the stage of social media. The remainder of this section will address what is shared and not shared by young people on their social media profiles. It is important to note that not all young people have social media accounts or profiles, and some of the reasons for this will also be addressed.

People experience connectivity online and through social media, which “offers new possibilities for experimenting with identity” (Turkle, 2011, p. 152). Social media have become new stages on which people can perform different aspects of the self. It is therefore worth noting that in each interview, I asked young people who are social media users to share with me how well they believe their social media profiles represent themselves. Kevin shared that his social media profiles represent him very well, highlighting both “lighthearted” and “darker” parts of himself. Relatedly, 15-year-old Selah says that her social media profiles represent her as who she “truly” is and she is “not pretending to be anything I’m not, like some people.” Selah alludes to how some people are superficial and do not show their true self or personality to others. Sachi, age 17, believes his social media profiles are “a pretty good representation” of who he is, “how I’m feeling that day, or like... and just who I am. I think it is ...almost there. I’d say 80 percent. Not all the way, ‘cause you’re never who you are online, as they say.”

Sachi's statement highlights a growing concern among young people and adults alike: while social media connects us all together, it is possible to experiment with different identities, whether that is through choosing to represent some aspects of oneself but not others, or pretending to be someone else entirely. This concern is not unfounded, and is supported by research by Gardner and Davis (2013), James (2014), and Turkle (1995; 2011), which suggests that people are hiding behind their screens, taking advantage of the anonymity of the Internet and pretending to be different versions of themselves, or different people altogether. This concern has been present since *The New Yorker* featured a poignant social commentary on this issue with a cartoon depicting two dogs: one dog sitting in front of a desktop computer, saying to a second dog, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog" (Steiner, 1993). However, others disagree, arguing the "real and the virtual are mutually constituted" (Valentine & Holloway, 2002, p. 302), and young people present themselves to the world online in ways they would offline. In this study, no participants discussed pretending to be people other than themselves online, but still acknowledge the importance of how one presents oneself to others – and the effort they put into thinking about how they present themselves to others in the digital space.

Young people are aware that others form opinions of them based on how they present themselves, primarily through their appearance in photographs that are shared online. Joelle, aged 15, shares that her profile and page on "Tumblr shows more of me than my Instagram" because "I don't like the camera on my phone, so I don't really use it. I just barely post anything... I spend a lot of time with my cousin, so most of the time I'm just re-posting pictures that she posts." Joelle cares about the quality of the photos she posts to her social media accounts, and the image of herself that that creates through these photos, so she re-posts the photos of higher quality that her cousin has already posted online. Joelle is an example of a young person who seeks to put their best self forward online. There are also people like Imani, aged 14, who comments on friends' selfies to say, "you're pretty," and thereby validates friends' posts. If Imani and Joelle were connected on social media, Joelle might appreciate a comment from Imani about how beautiful she looks in her high-quality photos.

Young people are concerned with their image, and some young people go to great lengths to control their image online, curating the content thoughtfully to manage what others see. While many young people starting in a new school view that transitional experience in and of itself as an opportunity to present a new self, and a new identity to new classmates, in today's digital world that transition also includes reinventing oneself on social media. For instance, Tanesha, aged 16, recreated her Facebook profile to improve her image when she transitioned from elementary school to middle school, because her previous account had "a lot of bad pictures of me. And I was like, going to a new school, I gotta start over." Tanesha's decision to develop a new Facebook profile to reflect her new status in a new school emphasizes one way to curate the content of one's profile to manage one's image (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Tanesha chose to keep her past self private, and display this new, more mature self to her new classmates.

In contrast, some young people, like Kaitlyn, aged 16, are more concerned about privacy – keeping private information safe – and less concerned about their online image. Young people with this concern for privacy do not share much personal information or pictures on their social media profiles aside from their name. Kaitlyn, in particular, does not "like the whole idea that someone can just look at your profile and get your information." Young people and adults often experience this concern, and every social media platform has different settings and policies for privacy, blocking, etc. (Davies & Eynon, 2013). danah boyd (2014) notes that young people find it difficult to keep up with ever-changing privacy settings on various sites, such as Facebook, making online content potentially less secure, or not as private as they think it is. But, sometimes privacy settings give an illusion of information safety (Gardner & Davis, 2013). For example, Snapchat is an app that allows users to send self-destructing pictures and videos to other users. Some users turn to Snapchat to send risky images to others (such as nude photos or sexts), but the recipient may take a screenshot or use a second device to capture the image, so the image has not really been destroyed. Similarly, even content that was posted online with the intent on leaving it there can be downloaded and saved by others without consent (Davis & Weinstein, 2017). Kaitlyn, and others, demonstrate reasonable concern about what is shared on a social media profile, leading to Kaitlyn's decision to limit the personal information and photos that she shares online. This sort of concern may lead Kaitlyn and her like-minded peers to

share more about themselves with others in ways that are not digitally mediated, and to keep more aspects of the self private and hidden from others.

Others are concerned about the impact of present posts on one's future self. For example, 14-year-old Imani chooses to share some aspects of her life, but not others, on social media. Imani is wary of what others might think of her based on what she posts on her social media profile, including people outside of her normal social circles – especially future employers. Imani shows concern for her future employability, and does not like to post things “that are gonna affect me in the future.” Imani knows that “people search through, say... their Facebook before they even go for the interview” and cautions against posting pictures of “doing drugs or drinking” because employers “just don't want that for their work environment.” Imani, at 14 years old, already understands the idea of the digital afterlife: “I don't do it, but anything stupid, I wouldn't post it on social media because I know it doesn't go away forever.” If Imani were to do anything that she would regret if it was posted online, this aspect of herself is kept private, and off social media. Similarly, Jackie, aged 16, says that her parents tell her to think about what would happen if her “grandfather saw” what she posted online, alluding to judgment from family members on social media profile content.

There are other reasons for limiting the personal information that is shared online: for example, young people like Joseph, aged 16, would rather have people get to know him in person than online, and does not share many things about himself on his social media accounts. He does not think his social media profiles represent him well, and explains that if someone wants to get to know him, they should “talk to me... people that see my Facebook would be like, ‘oh, he's quiet, he doesn't do much.’ But people that know me in like, the outside of technology, they'd be like, ‘oh, he's creative. He's funny.’” Joseph highlights what many young people have difficulty articulating: while social media profiles can display pieces of one self, one's likes, interests, and friends, there is often more to each person than what exists on a social media profile. Joseph seeks a deeper connection with others that extends beyond the posts, photos, and Likes we share with our social media networks.

It is also clear that young people may also decide that they do not wish to share *any* aspect of themselves on social media at all, and actively choose to not have social media

profiles. In some cases, this is a result of parental influence upon attitudes about social media. Kenai, aged 14, mentions that people are “surprised” to learn that he does not have accounts on “Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace.” Kenai believes social media is a “waste of time” and he would “much rather talk to someone in person and interact, instead of like, spending so much time on social media.” Joseph, mentioned above, would agree. For Kenai, “over time, I’ve kind of gotten a bad impression of [social media], even though it’s probably not that bad. My mom has been telling me, ‘don’t use Twitter!’” Kenai has received many negative messages about social media from his mother, which have shaped his beliefs about social media use. Concerned parents tend to warn their adolescent children about some of the negative consequences of sharing oneself on social media. Madeline, aged 17, says that on her social media profiles, she tries “to put a good representation” of herself, because “anyone can see it... when I first got [social media accounts], my parents told me ‘if there was a billboard of you, would you want all the stuff you posted on there on that billboard?’ So I try to keep true to that.” Kenai’s mother explicitly told him *not* to use social media, and he personally finds it to be a “waste of time,” while Madeline’s parents cautioned her to not share too much personal information, perhaps harboring similar fears as Kaitlyn. Kenai and Madeline have both experienced some form of parental control that influences what they share on social media, and the values they assign to social media.

Analogously, Jackie’s parents – especially her mother, who advised her against posting anything online that she would be embarrassed by or ashamed of if her grandfather saw – seem to have some influence on Jackie’s social media activity. Jackie revealed that she is “not allowed to get Facebook,” but on Instagram and Twitter, she is “only allowed to Follow people I know,” thereby keeping her personal information less accessible to others online. This level of protection may be preventing Jackie from connecting with others whom she might not have met through her existing social circles. Jackie’s parents evidently have rules and guidelines regarding Jackie’s approach to social media, as many parents of adolescents do, for the sake of their children’s privacy and protection.

Parents often regulate their children’s media use (Ito, et al., 2010; Tapscott, 1998). A national survey of parents of young people ages 13 to 17 in the United States found that 60 per cent of parents have ever checked their child’s social media profiles, while 39 per

cent of parents have used parental controls to block, filter, or monitor the online activities of their adolescent children (Pew Research Center, 2016). Moreover, 16 per cent of parents surveyed use parental controls to restrict their child's use of his or her cellphone (Pew Research Center, 2016). From this information and the personal anecdotes of Jackie and other participants in this study, we can infer that parental control may be stifling young people's ability to learn about current events, political issues, and different viewpoints, which may impact young people's means of connecting to others, especially through online platforms.

Maisie, aged 14, has had multiple social media accounts, but removed herself from Instagram for reasons of her own choosing – not her parents'. Maisie reflected on her own social media use, and that of her peers. She shared with me that she frequently notices the carefully curated nature of social media profiles, as “a lot of people are trying to photograph their life in a way that makes them look really good. And like... tells a cool story about them.” Maisie notices what scholars have observed (Goffman, 1959; Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008; Schlenker, 2012) – that everyone is doing their best to present themselves to the world in the best possible light:

I am friends with these kinds of people who have Instagram, and they spend a whole event just trying to get the right picture to post. And like, trying to get the right pose that looks naturally cool, but they're really making a huge effort to look that way. So it was just like, a lot of faking who you are. And I noticed I was starting to do that. Like... focusing on just getting the right picture, and then leaving somewhere. And not caring about having that actual experience... what they were using it for was not really anything positive, it was just kind of, like narcissistic, and trying to show off to people.

Scholars agree that social media are often curated as a “highlight reel” of the most positive moments of one's daily life (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014). With individuals wishing to present a self that is “polished and glorified” (Schlenker, 2012, p. 543), recent trends demonstrate pressure to be perfect online (Davis & Weinstein, 2017; Gardner & Davis, 2013). Forty per cent of social media users between the ages of 13 and 17 years old report feeling pressure to post only content that makes them look good to others, and content that will be popular as measured by the number of comments and Likes (Lenhart, 2015). Maisie has discovered the negative effects of this pressure, and that she herself is susceptible to it, and not enjoying each moment as much as she ought

to be. Maisie indicated that there is indeed a struggle in choosing which personal aspects to share with social media networks, and how others will judge those aspects. Those who expend the energy to take the perfect photo to highlight that they were at a concert may want to illustrate that they are outgoing and enjoy music, and may not even realize that posting the “right picture” may be interpreted by others, like Maisie, as artificial. The nuances of people’s perceptions of what is shared on social media are complicated, and often not thought about among this age group. Maisie was the only participant to vocalize this complexity of profile curating in this way, and decided to remove herself from the culture of “faking it” on social media by deleting her Instagram account. When Maisie decided to reactivate her Instagram account several months later, she acknowledged that editing and posting photos on the app is “fun,” and she can still enjoy it while being consciously aware that Instagram is not a full representation of a person’s life. Maisie expressed thoughtful views about social media and other topics, which are documented in the participant vignette presented in Appendix G.

Individuals make judgments of themselves based on what they perceive others think of them (James, 2014). Indeed, as Maisie highlighted, young people vary what they share on social media based upon who from their social circles Follow them, and the judgments they might receive from others about the lives they lead. Participants like Elsie, aged 17, recognize a distinction between social media platforms, and therefore exercise varying levels of discretion about the content that is shared, and who is allowed to Follow those profiles and posts. Elsie discerns her posts between Facebook and Tumblr. On Facebook, Elsie tends to be “more closed off” because she is Facebook friends with her rabbi and childhood nanny, and “can’t talk about these things in front of them.” Elsie’s home, synagogue, and digital worlds have collided on Facebook, which influences the nature of her disclosures through social media (Gil-Lopez, Shen, Benefield, Palomares, Kosinski, & Stillwell, 2018). Elsie does not feel comfortable divulging certain opinions and personal information – such as her relationship status – to these figures in her life, because they are close to her in a way that a parent is. Elsie eludes to a common struggle that individuals experience when presenting themselves to different audiences online: each audience expects a different image of Elsie (Rui & Stefanone, 2012).

Elsie goes online to communicate with friends – not share her feelings with the adults in her life. Teenagers, like Elsie, view space online as “private” – separate from the spaces that are controlled by parents and teachers (boyd, 2007a). While it may seem counter-intuitive, young people use social network site profiles and comment areas as a private space with a public component (boyd, 2007a). On Tumblr, for example, Elsie would “re-blog stuff” that she “wouldn’t want the rest of my family seeing,” but she is content with publicly sharing certain interests as long as the post remains anonymous. Elsie asserts that, in her opinion, Facebook is “so much more public, and I’m much more surrounded by like, everyone in my life... whereas like, on Tumblr, it’s like, well, there are a couple people from school or wherever who Follow me, but for the most part, it’s just a bunch of random strangers.” Elsie shared that her Tumblr page does not contain any identifying information – her given first name and surname are not listed. Elsie uses Tumblr to share with a few people from school and many strangers the things that she is not comfortable disclosing to her rabbi and childhood nanny, among other close relatives. Elsie is just one example of a young person who shares a public self and a private self on different platforms; other young people use different social media sites and platforms for different purposes and means of self-expression, which will continue to be explored in Section 4.3. Elsie’s experiences are further documented in the participant vignette presented in Appendix F.

There are many different reasons for why young people wish to share some parts of themselves but not others. These preferences for presenting oneself exist because each young person has a different idea and goal of who they want to be in each social circle, including on social networking websites. Each person presents themselves according to their own values, or the values imparted on them by their families and communities, and wider society. We saw that parents, in particular, influence how young people view certain stages on which they present themselves, particularly on social media platforms. But young people are able to present and express themselves in many different ways, according to what is available to them, and what others expect of them.

In contemporary society, young people are often presenting themselves in digitally mediated ways, which afford young people the opportunity to share different aspects of themselves to different audiences (Turkle, 2011). The distinction between the private and public self is most significant when young people consider what to share on their

social media profiles. The private self is not always revealed, as demonstrated by Bethany's account of her keeping her sadness to herself. There is a pressure to be perfect – especially on social media. In this digital era, people want to control other's impressions of them by presenting and expressing themselves most favorably (Brown, 1998; Williams & Gilovich, 2008) in digital ways. Goffman (1959) argued that social life is a series of performances in which people project their identities to others, and in contemporary society, young people are often performing as the best versions of themselves: doing the activities, wearing the clothes, attending the concerts that will receive the most Likes on social media.

### **4.3 Self- Expression**

Expressing oneself is a tangible display of one's identity, and individuals are constantly aware of impression management: the expression that one gives, or what an individual intends to express, and the expression that one gives off, or how others interpret those actions (Goffman, 1959). In contemporary society, forms of self-expression vary, and may depend on their social contexts and motivations to try new identities. This section details how the young people in this study express themselves through emotion (exhibited by the arts), experimenting with different physical appearances (such as hairstyles and dress), actions, and all the while using social media to develop and present themselves to others.

Sean and Maisie enjoy expressing themselves and their emotions through the arts. Sean, aged 15, likes to play music, because it is a “good way to show emotion and my thoughts.” Allowing oneself to display emotion, even through music, is a means of expressing one's inner thoughts or feelings. Maisie, aged 14, likes to draw, write, and dance, because “even if I'm expressing myself like, in a negative way, at the end of it, I feel better... and especially writing ... If I'm like feeling something and I don't know exactly what it is, and I like write about it, it helps me understand more about myself.” Some days, Maisie, like the rest of us, has a bad day. When she goes to dance class, “We do all kinds of dance. Um, and just kinda like moving your body, and it's not super technical, it's just like, fun. And after that, I definitely feel um... not only like, more awake, but I feel like I'm thinking clearer and I'm more in touch with what I'm feeling specifically, and just kind of like, blah.” Emotions and self-awareness are components

of identity – how one perceives oneself, and their interactions with the world around them (Stets, 2006). Both Sean and Maisie feel an emotional release after engaging in an activity that allows them to express themselves and leave with a better understanding of themselves afterwards.

Robert, aged 16, likes to express himself through writing, especially through sharing quotes. Robert divulged, “On Snapchat, I write quotes and stuff like that. Like, if it’s a certain type of quote that I see, I would screenshot it, memorize it, and then like, text it on Snapchat or something... ‘When you’re happy, you enjoy music, and then when you’re sad, you understand the lyrics.’” Robert can relate to this quote because he has “a lot of songs on my phone that like, when I’m just like, in a good mood, I can listen to it, and I really don’t understand what they’re saying, but I enjoy the music. But then at certain times, you’re feeling down and you’re listening to sad songs, you can actually understand what that person’s saying. Can feel their pain, also.” Robert uses technology as a way to express and share himself with his social network on Snapchat. He also pinpoints music – which he listens to on his phone – as a way to discover his emotions. Similarly, Hannah, aged 16, likes to post

Selfies. And I like to post my favorite quotes .... My mom says that I post way too much about her... because people find her funny and I like to entertain people. I just like to do that so people get a sense of me, so they don’t just see like a picture, and they’re not like ‘oh this girl is something.’ And then if they read my posts and stuff, they’ll be like, ‘oh she’s completely different.’

Selfies and status updates – whether they include quotes or not – are examples of identity exploration and expression in contemporary society (Davis & Weinstein, 2017).

Dress is another way to communicate one’s identity to others (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Tanesha, aged 16, chooses to primarily express herself in this way. In our interview, she reflected for a moment after describing her clothing choices and said that “there is a long history of people telling women what they should wear, what they’re supposed to be. So I feel like as a country, a little bit more liberal, people having their decisions saying what they want to do. And one thing that I can control at this age, at this moment, is the way I dress.” Tanesha alludes to the belief that at her age, there is much she cannot control. I asked Tanesha to describe how this treatment of women

affects her clothing decisions, and others' reactions to those decisions. Tanesha shared a story from the day of our interview, when she arrived at school wearing a dress that "reached about to my knees," and a pair of trainers. One of her teachers commented that her outfit was "not ladylike," and told Tanesha she "should be wearing flats, a longer dress with a cardigan." Tanesha expressed her frustration and disbelief that her teacher would say such a thing: "it's what I want to wear, it's what makes me feel comfortable, it's what I want to wear. So, you're trying to tell me this is inappropriate for me, but I'm not showing anything... it's just, me expressing me, showing my calf." Tanesha attributed her teacher's attitude to the idea that "a lot of people from older generations still feel that women shouldn't have as much freedom as they do now, or they're not used to the kind of freedom that young girls are getting today." Tanesha values fair and equal treatment of women, especially with regards to what society has expected of women. Tanesha's values come through in how she decides to dress herself, and are documented alongside her other experiences in the participant vignette presented in Appendix I. Other participants have other ways of sharing their values as parts of their public selves.

Young people in this study referred to the concept of being "true to oneself" and represent themselves on their social media profiles according to how they characterize themselves and their values. Marcia's (1980) commitment stage of identity status theory is one in which adolescents adhere to their convictions and values. Values can be expressed to others as actions: Nadia, aged 16, values her involvement with her community, particularly related to her concerns about education and rights for people in her age group. These values translate into Nadia being a very active member of her community, specifically her citywide youth council. Nadia believes that it is incredibly important to be involved in one's community, because she is "very interested in these different issues that go along in our community and just in the world in general." Nadia asserts that the topics that she and her fellow youth council members discuss are relevant outside of her immediate surroundings. It is important to Nadia to spread "the word to the world" because current events "affect everybody, at the end of the day." Beyond this youth council, Nadia spends some of her free time volunteering at her local library, and participating in rallies and events for the Black Lives Matter Movement. The youth council has even created Facebook pages for their campaigns as a means of getting other students involved. Sachi, Kenai, and Kaitlyn also like to express

themselves through their actions. This exhibition of personal values connects to civic identity, which will be explored in depth in Chapter Five.

It is important to note society and the communities of which one is a part can influence self-expression. In some cases, expressing oneself may serve a social and societal purpose, such as resisting stereotypes. Kali, aged 16, feels that it is her duty to live her life as a “rebuttal” to stereotypes about young women of color. Kali shared the stereotype that “we [women of color] are always angry, and that we always want to fight, and that we’re so aggressive.” Kali laughed and said, “That’s not me at all!” Instead of “getting online and writing a whole rebuttal,” Kali says the biggest impact she can make to change people’s misconceptions is to let her “life be one [a rebuttal].” By living her life and expressing herself as a “positive” and “considerate” and “optimistic” person, Kali believes she can prove these stereotypes wrong. The first measure Kali alluded to taking to combat stereotypes was taking to the Internet as a platform for her voice to express herself, illustrating the pervasiveness of technology as a platform on which to share one’s voice. In a similar vein, Martin discusses how he expresses himself as a young black male in America.

### **4.3.1 The Case of Martin**

Martin expressed a widespread sentiment about police brutality toward black males, a sentiment felt throughout the United States during the time of this study, wherein nearly one-third of the participants identified as black Americans. Martin thoughtfully articulated the complex thoughts and feelings about race, and what it means to express oneself in a way that combats stereotypes about others with a shared identity. His case provides insight into the many factors that young people consider when they present themselves to others in contemporary society, especially the perceptions of others.

Martin first introduced his concern about how others perceive him based on his skin color in our first interview. Martin is cautious to express himself because he does not want to seem “better than anyone. We’re supposed to be created equal.” He enjoys creating characters that look like him on video games, such as “NBA, 2K. It’s like a series. And you can create your own player. And... basketball, is seen as like, a black sport, but I think it feels kinda cool to create your own character and have them maybe

like a likeness of you.” Martin appreciates that people who look like him are represented in video games, but expressed a grave concern about the treatment of people like him in the physical world in our second interview several months later.

Martin talked a great deal about police brutality toward people of color in the United States. He shared some allusions to recent events of police brutality in Missouri and elsewhere in the United States. Martin “wasn’t necessarily nervous. I don’t know if it’s because I live up in the North, you know... I mean, I had heard about it and obviously I was disappointed but I wasn’t like, you know, I didn’t want it... I didn’t let it stop me, you know. I didn’t want to pout about it. But it was difficult, because you had different teenagers dying every week.” In the year prior to our interviews, there were several high-profile cases of police brutality against black Americans, including the shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Martin believed in his own relative safety, living in a “northern” more progressive state. The Midwestern and southern United States have a history of brutality toward people of color, even after the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

Martin went to what he referred to as a “gathering” in downtown Boston in the months leading up to our interviews, but did not want to get into any altercations there. The gathering that Martin alluded to was a rally for The Black Lives Matter movement, which, alongside the issue of police brutality against blacks, is very personal for him. Martin said he would still care very much if police brutality and inhumane treatment happened to people of another race, but he cares so much because it is *his* race that is most affected by police violence, and he feels “a connection, since those are your people.” Martin identifies with others like him, and feels a stronger motivation to take action because “some people take matters into their own hands instead of maybe waiting it out,” and while he normally “waits it out,” he now finds that waiting will only delay progress on the issue. Martin decided it was time to do something, which led to his attendance of this “gathering” for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Martin had not always spoken out against police brutality, and cites two hindrances as his reasons for this: “I am underage, so ... it isn’t ... I don’t think, necessarily that what I would say would be that big. Um... I am African American, so....” Martin sees his age and his race as a black person as a barrier to his efficacy. He prefers to express himself

through my actions, I’d say. I think... actions at times do speak louder than words... I may not look just like you, but I can still do the type of work you might do, maybe the same or even better. I know I’m like a big guy. You know, I should probably be outspoken than most. But ... I’m very humble and I try to ... have my actions show um, show who I am, what I am... what I stand for, stuff like that.

Martin reflected deeply on the way he represents others like him, and his actions to combat stereotypes:

I’m kinda talking about like, you know like, the U.S. and like, um, African-American male stuff, like that...how we kinda get bad raps sometimes. What I meant by like, speech and all that is like, you know, a lot of people...not necessarily a lot of people, but people that still have the traditional old ways... They don’t really expect, you know, my type of people to really speak vocabulary words, rather than slur words together and make slang and stuff like that – dialect.

Martin highlighted that his manner of speaking “has a good impact. I feel more confident when I’m talking to anybody. You know, I don’t feel nervous, or inferior, stuff like that. I feel more comfortable with my surroundings.” Martin’s story highlights what it is like to be a young black male in the United States today, and the consideration of his social contexts when presenting himself to others (Erikson, 1968; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 2012). His identity expression is cautious: he is careful about how he dresses and how he acts, so that others do not get the wrong idea about him. Martin, a young black male, highlights that in contemporary society – marked by technology use and, unfortunately, racial discrimination and violence – one must consider their race and voice. On some stages, this is simpler and results in fewer negative perceptions (i.e., selecting a black male character to represent himself on a video game) than others (i.e., using language that would make others perceive him as less intelligent). Martin’s experiences are further documented in the participant vignette presented in Appendix J.

#### **4.4 Typical Teenagers in Today's World**

Society expects certain things from young people in their teenage years. Society expects young people to utilize social media, which is a factor contributing to identity formation. Whether one chooses to keep parts of the self private, or share some parts of the self in the public, each individual is deciding how to express and present oneself and with whom to share different aspects of the self. Sharing aspects of oneself with others is inevitable when people connect and interact with each other, on any kind of platform. In contemporary society, the pressure to be perfect on social media informs how young people consider what to share on the most public platforms. This form of expression on social media often leads young people to their identities as “typical teenagers” – an identity that some young people have for themselves, whereas others have that identity thrust upon them by others.

The young people in this study spend time hanging out with and texting their friends, and use technology in their everyday life. Kali, aged 16, confides that young people are “impressionable,” and many typical conversations with her friends involve gossip. “You know, girls our age, we think about boys and stuff like that, but that’s not our main focus, whereas in high school, that’s all you’ll hear in the hallways, is who’s with who, and stuff like that,” she says. Peter, aged 17, explains that he and his friends “like to play basketball, play video games, and you know the usual teenage stuff. Hang out... um... we went to a concert this summer. You know, just regular stuff.” Naomi, aged 16, addresses the stereotype that teenagers are always on their phones: “I’m not a huge fan of texting. I do it, obviously: I’m a teenager, I text a lot.” Gossiping, playing video games, and texting are all typical activities and ways of interacting that people in this age group engage in frequently. Young people sometimes view themselves via the same lens through which society views them: as “typical” teenagers. When we hear that phrase, oftentimes we think about young people gossiping, using social media frequently, and being aloof in the world.

Unfortunately this characterization of young people as “typical teenagers” has sometimes prohibited them from engaging in society and in their communities in the ways that they would like to be involved. Veronica, herself a 15 years old, judges others on their maturity, or her perception of it. She prefers to focus her time on “the people I

know who are mature and won't stay in the mindset of a fifth grader and stuff like that, because at the same time I want friends that are impactful, not only to me but to society and to other people.” During our hour-long interview, I noticed that Veronica seemed mature for her age to want to surround herself with “impactful” people – I later found this field note inappropriate, as I had made a judgment about Veronica’s maturity based on her age, as many adults have. These judgments have “stifled” her and some of her classmates. Veronica is younger than most of her classmates, and “a lot of the time my friends will be doing something but I don’t have the age for it yet.” Her age precludes her from many opportunities that her classmates have, “like, jobs, for example, at stores, or I know there’s one thing. Like working with kids and stuff like that. Even though I could do something, it’s hard to find something for 15-year-olds because it’s always like 16-year-olds.” Laura has had similar setbacks. At 17 years old, Laura is not able to become an emergency medical technician (EMT), which is a necessary step in her pathway to her career goal of becoming a nurse. She said, “I think I’m gonna get my paramedic or EMT certification this summer...you have to be 18, so...” Kaitlyn, aged 16, says that even with some volunteer work, there is much she is excluded from until she is 18 years old: “for volunteer work, I think I have to wait ‘til 18 to do most of the stuff. I dunno, I think the whole just um... food pantries and stuff ... that’s good, but I want to do something more than that with my volunteer work, and my age prevents that.”

This idea of the typical teenager can be helpful to some to situate young people in a stage of emotional development. Other times, this label can be harmful in that it dismisses young people in this age group, and perpetuates the perception that young people are apathetic about politics, and would rather spend time hanging out with friends, playing video games, or using social media, which will continue to be explored in future chapters. Many participants who discuss these activities – including Kali, Peter, and Naomi, would exemplify this aspect of the identity of an American young person. When young people are reduced to the stereotype of “typical teens,” it dismisses the other parts of them – the parts that desire to be engaged, that show initiative, their other interests – and feeds into the stereotype even further. When young people don’t see themselves beyond being “typical teens,” it prevents them from looking outside the box to think about what else they could be doing beyond those activities that show their engagement in politics and the community. Young people are unique individuals with

many diverse interests that go beyond texting, video games, and gossip: Maisie loves dance, Jane loves robotics, Peter enjoys teaching preschool children, Nadia is an active member of the Youth Council of her city. Young people must be understood in this holistic way. This holistic understanding will help educators meet young people where they are to best design civic education curriculum – knowing young people’s interests and communities, can create opportunities for young people to be involved in ways that are meaningful and interesting to them.

#### **4.5 Understanding Presentations of the Self in Contemporary Society**

Young people are shaped by the digital world – the nature and multitude of the different stages on which young people can now present and perform their identities offers new opportunities to think about the self in new ways. Young people take aspects of their environment (Hasebrink & Paus-Hasebrink, 2007), relationships, and interactions with others to construct their identities (Côté & Levine, 2002; Flanagan, 2013), and can experiment with their self-presentation through technology (Gardner & Davis, 2013). Martin demonstrates this and how he shares pieces of his identity through his decisions about presenting himself in the online gaming community.

In a society characterized by widespread technology use, technology now informs the process of identity development through the presentation of the self. Young people now have a broader audience with whom to share themselves, and the nature of social media prompts young people to curate their social media profiles according to each audience. Some young people choose to present themselves to others on social media, and on specific social media sites, whereas others choose not to. Media and current culture “celebrates personal disclosure,” and many young people express themselves on social media with selfies and status updates (Loader, 2007, p. 2). The private self is not always revealed to others, as illustrated by Kevin, who shares his “darker side” with a few others, but tries to keep it to himself so as not to upset anyone. Other young people wrestle with this tension of what to share and with whom. As young people pave their way into various social circles, they want to be seen in the best possible light (Brown, 1998; Williams & Gilovich, 2008). Perhaps this explains why Laura wanted to distance herself from Live Action Role Play, to maintain others’ perceptions of her as not “nerdy.”

Young people experience a tension when deciding between what to keep private and what to present to others, which may affect relations with the community. In the community and civic setting, young people must consider what others in the community will think of them and the opinions that they share, and whether they will be heard based on their identity. This is particularly difficult for young people, because adults may look at young people and make a quick judgment that young people are “too young” to have a concern about a specific issue. The burden then falls on young people to prove others wrong about these perceptions, putting them in a position to possibly struggle even further when deciding what to keep private and what to share with others. Presentation of the self has become digitally mediated, which has implications for considering how young people present their civic identities as well. Goffman (1959) argued that social life is a series of performances in which people project their identities to an audience of others. How one sees oneself fitting into and contributing to a group or larger society impacts how one presents the self to that group, and, consequently, the version of self that the group expects the person to be (Schlenker, 2012). Young people’s values and belief systems are informed by these interactions and experiences with others. Chapter Five will present the findings for the factors and contexts that shape young people’s civic identity in today’s world, and Chapter Six will present how civic identity is experienced by young people in contemporary society.

## Chapter Five | Findings

### Civic Identity

Chapter Four concluded that in contemporary society, young people have a broader audience to which they present themselves, and a diversity of stages on which to present these aspects of the self. Data from this study reveals that young people experience tension when deciding between which aspects of the self to share with others and which to keep private, especially concerning political views. Elsie chose to keep her political views hidden from her social media accounts so that her nanny and rabbi would not see, and Martin is conscious to present himself as articulate so that the American public, who often perceives young black males as less capable, takes him and his views seriously. Conceptualizations of the self and one's values, and decisions about sharing these parts of the self with the world, can shed light on the understanding of individuals' positions within communities and societies, and how individuals can engage in them as citizens and community members, presenting themselves as group members, but also abiding by the expectations of others in the group. This process underlies the formation of civic identity. Chapter Five builds on the findings presented in Chapter Four by unpacking the concept of civic identity and understanding how its two components are understood and experienced by young people in contemporary society and what lived citizenship (Hall & Williamson, 1999) looks like for these young people.

While this study focuses on young people aged 14 – 17, it is important to recognize that children come to develop the ideas of citizenship, participation, and social organization before they have received formal schooling (Dias & Menezes, 2014), and reach the life stage that has been investigated in the present study. It is important to note this because

as individuals mature, they have varying levels of understanding of what it means to be a citizen and a member of a community; the level of political understanding increases with age (Dias & Menezes, 2014). Gillman and Sofer (1978) found that maturity has more influence than individual factors (i.e., sex, social class, and intelligence) on young people's understanding of politics and political thought.

Bennett (2008) notes, "the entire question of civic engagement is confounded by how one chooses to define citizenship itself" (p. 8). To better understand how young people understand their own civic identity and civic engagement, the findings presented in this chapter detail the conceptualizations of citizenship as experienced and understood by young people. As noted in the literature review in Chapter Two, in this study, the notion of civic identity has been modified from Knepfelkamp (2008) and Youniss and Yates (1997). Civic identity is a concept comprised of two parts:

- 1) a broader sense of how an individual develops and situates oneself and one's beliefs within a broader group of people,
- and -
- 2) how that individual engages with others in the social, political, and economic structures within their society.

This chapter will be presented in two sections, each which illustrates a component of the civic identity definition, as experienced and expressed by the young people in this study. Section 5.1 will illustrate young people's conceptualizations of citizenship, which is the mechanism through which we can understand how young people situate themselves within society and the world around them. As one's understanding of citizenship "can provide the meaning for political action" (Loader, 2007, p. 5), this section will lead into Section 5.2, which will reveal how young people conceptualize civic engagement. With the context of citizenship and civic engagement for civic identity, Chapter Six will address the ways in which young people are engaging in the political world.

## **5.1 What Does it Mean to be a Citizen?**

Jones and Gaventa (2002) note there is still more to learn about how individuals understand themselves as citizens, and Gillman and Sofer (1978) explain that political

thought develops over time. There has been a lack of research in this area as it pertains to young people between the ages of 14 and 17 in the contemporary era. Understanding what young people mean by citizenship, and how they think about it, is an important component of civic identity and how young people might express that identity to others, both within and outside of their communities. How one understands citizenship will impact how one perceives one's ability to engage civically and effectively (Dias & Menezes, 2014), making citizenship an important concept to investigate prior to delving into how young people understand and experience civic engagement in today's political world, which can then inform civic education curriculum. This section will illustrate the ways in which young people define and experience citizenship.

While citizenship has been investigated in adults, the most recent study relevant to the population investigated in the study for this thesis is the Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) study on young people aged 16 – 23 years old. The patterns of citizenship conceptualizations that emerged from the study presented in this thesis reflect the five models described by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003). Consequently, close attention has been given to their work, which has informed the manner in which the findings from this study will be presented in this chapter. The five models, introduced in Chapter Two, are internalized at various ages and are as follows:

- 1) *Universal Status* – feeling like one belongs, including all people in a community as citizens; internalized at age 5.
- 2) *Social Contract* – abiding by the rights and duties that are governed by the law; internalized between ages 8 and 9.
- 3) *Respectable Economic Independence* – having waged employment, paying taxes, having a house and a family; internalized after age 13.
- 4) *Constructive Social Participation* – being an active citizen contributing to and helping the community; internalized between ages 8 and 10.
- 5) *The Right to a Voice* – feeling that one has a voice and is heard, with voting as a symbolic action of this model of citizenship; internalized at age 8.

These principles of citizenship can be identified by people as young children, who further develop these principles in adolescence, when young people think more critically about civic and political participation, the right to vote, and community service (Dias & Menezes, 2014). The extent to which young people identified themselves as citizens in the Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) study mostly reflected social status developments: had they employment and paid tax, had they been involved in their communities or undertaken voluntary work; or had they voted? (p. 242). Similarly, the participants in the study presented in this thesis reflected on their own personal status and experiences in the community and in the United States when contemplating what citizenship meant to them, and deciding whether they felt like a citizen.

As the sections that follow will illustrate, technology plays a smaller role in young people's conceptualizations of citizenship than I expected. Young people did not relate their definitions of citizenship to extend to their practices and behavior online, which would fall under the concept of digital citizenship (Hargittai, 2002; Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickhur, & Rainie, 2011; Seale & Dutton, 2012), but rather referred to citizenship as community or nation membership. As young people utilize social media as a primary source of information about current events, they were informed about the immigration debate and the anti-immigration sentiment that was disseminated through Twitter, especially through the Tweets made by then presidential candidate Donald Trump. There has been an ongoing trend toward a personalization of politics (Mesch & Coleman, 2007), which the young people of this study exemplify. Being surrounded by this rhetoric prompted young people to consider citizenship in these very personal ways, related to their own family's history and the stories of their friends' immigration issues. As this is contemporary rhetoric that still exists in the United States and in other democracies, particularly in Europe, the five themes of citizenship that emerged from the data in this study could be experienced in other democracies in contemporary society.

The results presented here demonstrate that the conceptualization process of "citizenship" among young people is fluid (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003; 2005), and the experiences that lead to these conceptualizations are digitally mediated. Young people understand citizenship in ways similar to the participants of Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox's (2003; 2005) work, but experience citizenship in different ways.

For some, citizenship is the 1) emotional sense of belonging within a community. For others, citizenship has a 2) legal meaning, attached to various rights and privileges. Sometimes, 3) these emotional and legal meanings become intertwined. For others still, citizenship is a factor of one's 4) age and 5) active involvement in the community. Young people in this study understood citizenship as a function of one or more of these themes. The five sections that follow will present five themes of citizenship, as the 14 – 17 year old participants in this study understand and experience it in contemporary society.

### **5.1.1 Citizenship as an Emotional Sense of Belonging**

The first theme of citizenship that participants in this study recognize is a sense of belonging and emotional connection that one feels as a member of a community. The universal status model described by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) applies to this particular understanding of citizenship by the participants of this study. Many participants understood themselves as citizens through the theme of a sense of belonging, often referring to citizenship as being “part of” something: everyone is a citizen. This understanding of a sense of belonging has been observed in previous understandings of community membership throughout the 1960s through 1980s (Buss & Portnoy, 1967; McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

When I asked Imani, aged 14, about her understanding of citizenship, she seemed unsure of her answer, seeking confirmation that she had given the right definition for citizenship: “part of something?” Addie, aged 14, says citizenship is when “you’re a part of a place.” Analogously, Laura, aged 17, explains that citizenship is “being part of a larger community” even without “having a real factor in things.” This feeling of belonging extends to all citizens, even if the legal rights and privileges are limited, as they often are for the young people in this study, as they are not yet old enough to vote. Aidan, aged 15, relates Laura’s idea to the importance of being “recognized” and “included” by members of the community, and Zelda, aged 14, agrees. Being recognized and included also means understanding that “what you do does impact others,” as Kali, aged 16, says. These young people situate themselves in a community around a physical place like a neighborhood or school, but this emotional sense of

belonging to a community extends to people and areas that exist beyond these closer circles.

Martin, aged 15, likens citizenship to “community,” as his aforementioned peers do, but Habibah, aged 16, explains that citizenship extends to a “bigger kind of community.” For Habibah, this citizenship and community membership encompasses all of humanity, “Because... you’re part of community with people you’ve never even met before all around the world, just because they share something in similar, which is citizenship.” Habibah explains that people all around the world are citizens, even if they are citizens of different places. Habibah compares the feeling of being a citizen to a common ground upon which people all around the world can stand. Citizens feel a sense of emotional connection to each other, and as Keegan, aged 18, says, being able to feel “the pain of the community” demonstrates citizenship – and kinship – within that community. Similarly, Robert, aged 16, says that citizenship goes beyond community “to represent” that community to others outside of that community. This idea translates into patriotism, expressed by Nora, aged 15, as she views citizenship as having “pride in [one’s] country.” Extending an emotional connection to people around the world demonstrates that a sense of belonging and feeling of being understood does not always have to be restricted to a physical place.

Kaitlyn, aged 16, believes that people are citizens wherever their “home is.” This belief that citizenship is a sense of belonging to a group *and* a place is central to how Selah and Gwen, both aged 15, expand this definition of feeling a “part of” something. Selah was born in the United States, giving her legal status of citizenship that will be discussed in the next section, but also says she is “from Bangladesh.” Selah quietly stated that she feels like a citizen because “I’ve lived here for a very long time, and I just feel like I belong.” Selah visited Bangladesh once at age seven, and spent a year there to learn the language. It is interesting that Selah says she is *from* Bangladesh, even though she is a United States citizen and has lived in the United States for all of her life. Young people today have multiple cultural identities, and “first and second generation immigrants may have less difficulty in identifying with both their countries of birth and those of cultural heritage” (Loader, 2007, p. 6). Similarly, Joelle, also aged 15, asserts, “If you have lived here long enough, you don’t exactly have to be born here. If you live here and you can adapt to your surroundings, I think that’s basically a citizen.” Joelle

said that her parents are immigrants to the United States, and have applied for United States citizenship. Her personal family situation has influenced her understanding of what it means to be a citizen – or, what it *should* mean to be a citizen. Young people feel this way because they have spent enough time in their communities and in school that they feel a strong connection and sense of belonging where they are currently living. Young people have been accepted by their community, and feel the government should accept them as well. At the time of data collection and at the time of writing still, young people are surrounded by anti-immigration rhetoric on social media – particularly through Tweets by Donald Trump and his supporters (Osler & Starkey, 2018). This anti-immigrant sentiment seems to have deepened these young people’s sense that they have an emotional connection and sense of belonging to the United States, even if they are immigrants themselves or have an immigrant background.

### **5.1.2 Citizenship as a Legal Status**

As Joelle alluded, some young people understand citizenship through its legal meaning. Nadia, aged 16, defines citizenship as “to be a part of something, legally,” and Stephen, aged 14, says that citizenship means, “being able to say that you live in a country or place legally.” This legal meaning is attached to various rights and privileges, including commonly recognized “civic duties” such as voting and jury duty. These civic activities also fall under the social contract model described by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003), which involves abiding by the rights and duties set forth by the law. In the United States, the model of citizenship as a legal status can be traced back to the fight to abolish slavery (Ansley, 2005), particularly after the landmark Dred Scot decision by the Supreme Court acknowledged that legally, blacks could not be United States citizens (*Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sandford*, 1856). While much has changed in the United States in the last 170 years, the concept of citizenship as a legal status has not, as evidenced by participants in this study.

Most participants who comprehend citizenship as a legal concept begin with the understanding that Camille, aged 15, has: a group of people who “live under the same government.” Sean, aged 15, elaborates that this includes “understanding the U.S. politics system. And knowing what an actual citizen, like... the rules of being a citizen are.” Madeline, aged 17, says it is important for citizens to “know the basic principles of

what the community believes.” Both Sean and Madeline allude to knowing the rules of the social contract (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003).

Participants understand the government’s role in determining who is a citizen, particularly because of their knowledge about the law in the United States Code that dictates a person born in the United States or to United States citizen parents are automatically granted United States citizenship (8 U.S.C. §1401). Bethany, aged 14, explained that she asked her parents when she was “little, and they told me that I was born here so I am a citizen.” Hannah, aged 16, understands citizenship in the same way, and identifies as “a citizen of the United States because I was born here. And I feel like if you’re a citizen it’s somewhere you’ve known for your whole life.” Participants commonly related their citizenship to their country of birth or long-term residency, which has been found in other studies as well (Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003; 2005).

Kevin, aged 15, Maisie, aged 14, and Peter, aged 17, relate their understanding of citizenship as a legal status to the wider societal and political debate about the status of immigration in the United States. Kevin understands citizenship as “where you were born, that’s where you’ve been raised, that’s where you should be. And... sometimes, it doesn’t always dictate that’s where you should be. Because I know a lot of immigrants move here because that’s not where they want to be. I feel like citizenship really just shows where you’re from.” Kevin had been deeply affected by the information he consumed on social media and in traditional news media regarding Donald Trump’s position on immigration. Kevin shares that Donald Trump “put a new meaning to citizenship” because Donald Trump takes immigration “very seriously, like building a wall on the Mexican border, not allowing Muslims into the country. He uses all of that to try to stop immigration, which he will try to do.” At the time of our interview, in spring 2016, Donald Trump had not yet been elected President of the United States. At the time of writing, Donald Trump and his government twice attempted to ban travelers from Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States, and the contentious political and public debate surrounding a border wall with Mexico remains ongoing. Kevin also shared that his understanding of citizenship was “really shaped” by his United States History class. Kevin marveled at the fact that “a lot of people, back in the 1800s and 1900s, if you were born here, then yeah, you’re a U.S. citizen, but back in the

day, like women and um, African Americans, did not have a lot of rights. So that showed that ... citizenship is having the rights in a country, and stuff like that.” Kevin, at age 15, demonstrates a nuanced and thoughtful understanding of the legal meaning and implications of citizenship within the United States, reflecting on the history of the citizenship and immigration debate and relating it to the contemporary immigration debate.

Maisie, aged 14, further illustrated the nuances of the immigration debate in public discourse, particularly around the exclusivity of citizenship. “If you’re born here, that’s automatic citizenship, but that’s not the only way to get citizenship. You can move here from another country... I don’t like the process, but you can become a citizen. I think the idea of citizenship is practical, but also kind of exclusive.” Maisie notes that keeping track of who is in the country legally is “practical” for the government to know so that they can “help them and do what they need you to do for them. But pride and exclusion comes with that, because then... you take the label of ‘citizen’ and people put all kinds of meanings into it that target other people who aren’t citizens, and all of this controversy.” Maisie acknowledges that citizenship based on legal status is “exclusive” – it literally excludes many people who have been in the country their entire lives, even if they were brought to the country as infants. It is also exclusive in the sense that it is an elite club – United States citizenship is highly sought-after and coveted by many immigrants. Scholars also note the exclusivity of citizenship, and often describe it as a “prize worth having” (Frazer, 2008, p. 285). Peter, aged 17, illustrates the great lengths through which some of his friends’ families have gone through in order to gain this prize. Peter’s friends’ “parents came here... they had to do a long process to become an American citizen. And it’s not just being involved, but like... it’s a lot of hard work to be an American citizen.” Peter alludes to the citizenship test, and the process of becoming a citizen that Maisie decidedly labeled as “exclusive.”

### **5.1.3 Citizenship as a Legal Right to Belong**

Several participants view citizenship through a combination of the emotional and legal meanings described in the previous two sections. For Veronica, aged 15, citizenship means “to fit in.” While Veronica began to describe citizenship with this sense of belonging stance on citizenship, she continued, “a lot of the time you’re not actually a

citizen until you actually get your citizenship. Which has to do with fitting in, in a way.” Veronica explains that one is “a member of society if you fit into the expectations, which at the same time could be a citizen. People have to fit into certain rules; there is a way that people are expected to act, and at the same time, there are certain things that you can go around to find loopholes in where you can be yourself and do certain things that you want to do too.” Veronica’s understanding of citizenship combines this legal sense of citizenship through the social contract with the importance of feeling like one “fits in” emotionally.

This sense of belonging, and feeling of emotional connection to a place, extends beyond feeling concerned that you fit the norms and expectations of the society and community. Tanesha, aged 16, stresses, “if you identify with a place and you feel like it’s your home,” then one is a citizen. Tanesha shared that her Advanced Placement U.S. History class has shaped this view of citizenship. She is “a citizen of... many things, depend[ing] on what group I’m talking about. People take it in different... tenses. Some people say they’re not a citizen, but they could be, technically. But they say they’re not because they have more pride in their actual homeland country, rather than America.” At first, I thought Tanesha understood citizenship as pride in one’s country. She continued, “If you identify with a place and you feel like it’s your home, and that you have every right to be there, it should be citizenship. Not because you were born in a country or naturalized.” In Tanesha’s mind, citizenship is for anyone who feels a sense of belonging to a particular place, but also as a “right” to be there – “it is a mental thing, not a property thing.” Despite this view, Tanesha said that she has never had an experience in which she felt like a citizen.

As Osler and Starkey (2006) note, citizenship goes beyond legal status: it is also a “sense of belonging” (p. 441). Gwen, aged 18, explains that “where your heart belongs” and “if you have the papers to show it” dictates where you are a citizen. Gwen’s heart is “where I was born, so I consider myself a Cameroonian citizen...because I lived in Cameroon for eight years, and it’s not easy to let that go, even if I was still a kid. I still remember the roads to my house, it’s just like the experiences that you faced, and they shape like, where you feel like you’re a citizen.” Gwen alludes to the documentation necessary to prove one’s legal citizenship, but focuses on the emotional component of

citizenship by discussing that her heart is still in her childhood home country of Cameroon. Gwen is able to recall vivid images of Cameroon, making Gwen a Cameroonian citizen by Tanesha's definition of citizenship.

While Gwen feels she is still a citizen of Cameroon, even though she has been raised in the United States, Sawyer, aged 15, describes the opposite of this sentiment. For him, citizenship extends beyond being born in a place, and extends to "living and being raised here." There is a difference between being *born* in the United States and being *raised* in the United States. The experiences of growing up in a country and adopting the way of life and understanding are emotional investments, and go beyond the legal conditions of citizenship. The tension between these emotional and legal concepts of citizenship can be best illustrated by the personal experiences of 16-year-old Bibiana. When I first asked Bibiana what citizenship means to her, she said, "Nothing." After a moment, Bibiana clarified,

Well... not really nothing. But ... because I was born in the D.R. [Dominican Republic], I know that I wasn't born a citizen here [in the United States]. So... I guess it doesn't really mean anything to me because I came here at a really young age. I've... grown up in America. But at the same time, I'm not considered a citizen. I guess it's more of like a legal thing. Like a paperwork thing. That's why I feel like it doesn't really mean anything because it's just paperwork.

Loader (2007) states, "citizenship rights and obligations are less dependent upon membership of a particular territorial and legal society" (p. 6), but overall there is a blurry line between the emotional sense of belonging and the legal status that evokes citizenship. Bibiana, aged 16, exemplifies this tension. Loader (2007) implies that sense of belonging is more important, but Bibiana highlights the importance of the legality to have any "real say" in things. While Bibiana is not a legal citizen, she does *feel* like a member, even though she does not have any of the rights and privileges – Loader's (2007) "obligations." Bibiana highlights the complexity of growing up as an immigrant in the United States. She has spent the majority of her life in the United States, attending school and participating in her community, as her U.S. citizen peers have done. Reconciling how she can be "Americanized" because she has lived in the United States for all of her life and still not be a citizen is complex, and joins the elements of being *born* in the United States and *growing up* in the United States. It frustrates Bibiana that

she does not have the same rights and privileges of her peers, who, she claims, may not even know as much about politics or American society as she does. For Bibiana, the emphasis on legality, of lawful citizenship, is important. The word “citizen” triggers the idea of “paperwork.” Yet, when she describes what it means to be an active citizen, citizenship does not reflect legality. Rather, it refers to a person who is “involved in a lot of things ... in regards to what’s happening around your neighborhood.” Bibiana very clearly feels a sense of belonging in her community, and alludes to her ability to contribute and give back. Bibiana believes that an active citizen can be anyone, regardless of legal status – presumably because she wishes for herself that she had the same rights and privileges as her American-born peers. Bibiana’s nuanced experience of citizenship is documented further in the participant vignette presented in Appendix K.

At the time of these interviews, and even still at the time of writing, immigration policy in the United States pervades public discourse. During the 2016 presidential election campaign, Joseph, a 16-year-old Hispanic male, reminded his friend that his friend would get deported if Donald Trump were to win the election and follow through on campaign promises, which were communicated through Donald Trump’s Tweets and televised debate responses. Joseph shared a story about this friend (who he then referred to as his “associate” by means of distancing himself from his friend’s support of Donald Trump). Joseph asked his friend why he supported Trump, and his friend replied, “Because [Trump] is gonna send all the Spanish people out.” Joseph reminded his friend, “That includes you.” Joseph was surprised that his friend did not believe that the policy would affect his own immigrant family, perhaps not making the distinction between being *born* in the United States and *growing up* in the United States, as Bibiana had. Joseph’s understanding of citizenship as a combined emotional and legal status made him, like Kevin, more aware of the implications of the current immigration debate on his and his friends’ daily lives as young people.

#### **5.1.4 Citizenship as Defined by Age**

Sometimes, citizenship can be understood as limited to people of a certain age. The respectable economic independence model identified by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) touches on this theme, because it mainly focuses on those who are no longer dependent on parents and family. The participants in this study were very much

dependent on others for their financial security, but their experience of citizenship as it relates to their age was not solely based on financial and economic factors, as it was for the participants in the Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) study. Rather, the young people in this study wrestled with age as a factor that could potentially limit their role as citizens because they are not yet considered adults by the law and society. Kevin, aged 15, puts it simply: “I’m still a minor, I’m not an active citizen yet.”

Young people have this perception of citizenship as restricted by age because they have grown up in a democratic society that withholds certain rights and privileges until individuals reach age 18. The age of 18 is the point in life when most democratic cultures accept young people as “adults” and grant them full legal rights for political participation (Finlay, Wray-Lake, & Flanagan, 2010; Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008). Young people also understand the level of responsibility that comes along with some of these rights. Jillian, aged 15, shares that citizenship applies to people of a “certain level” of society: “if you’re a political leader, you have a bigger job to do than a fifteen year old.” Jillian discloses examples of responsibilities that come with adulthood: “legally drink, drive, have kids. There’s more pressure on adults, and older teenagers – young adults. Because you can still make mistakes and not have it affect you so much when you’re [younger]. But once you get to like, 16 and 17... 19 ... you’re talking about college, voting, drinking, all of that stuff that could affect your life.” Relatedly, Imani alludes to the responsibilities that individuals also have with their digital presence, because underage drinking is illegal, Imani cautions against teenagers posting pictures of “doing drugs or drinking.”

Jillian explains that responsibility for being a citizen is a duty that comes with adulthood. Paying taxes is a responsibility that many participants called to mind. Joseph, aged 16, perceives citizenship in a similar manner to Jillian, and thinks of citizenship as “paying taxes, basically. So like, for grown-ups. Not teenagers like me....But people that pay taxes and buy houses. Because buying a house would mean less people in the streets, basically. And that’s basically ... a working citizen.” Joseph illustrates citizenship that only “adults” can take part in, because adults have the financial privilege and means to do so. Joseph suggests his lower socioeconomic status when he discusses how purchasing houses would get people out of living “in the streets,” adding another layer of complexity to this definition of citizenship. Perhaps Joseph does not

believe that people from his neighborhood will be citizens because of the economic hardships they face, as he alluded. Joseph is not wrong in his perception that economic security contributes to citizenship, as prior research demonstrates higher levels of engagement among those of higher socioeconomic standing (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Naomi, aged 16, takes issue with these aforementioned ideas that citizenship is restricted to adults, and says, “I don’t think that just because I am not 18 doesn’t mean I’m not a citizen.” I asked Naomi to elaborate about what it means to be a citizen as a young person. For Naomi, “It means taking responsibility for yourself and how you treat your community and the people around you... in your town, and who you live with, and the town itself and making sure you’re upholding what you should be doing, not doing bad things.” Rather than citizenship being defined by age, citizenship is defined by responsibility – for some, like Joseph, that means paying taxes. For others, like Naomi, that means being socially responsible and being aware of how your actions may impact others. This final element of citizenship that Naomi discussed – the responsibility for one’s actions – introduces the final theme of citizenship: being actively involved in one’s community.

### **5.1.5 Citizenship as Active Involvement in the Community**

Ava, aged 16, asserts, “I don’t think age has anything to do with [citizenship]. Because you see such young people making an impact, and I think that’s most people’s goal, is to make an impact in some way.” Ava stresses that young people are citizens by making an impact, by being involved in their communities. Thirteen other participants in this study viewed citizenship as an element of active involvement in community and society, similar to the constructive social participation model described by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003).

It is worth noting that the participants who understand citizenship to mean active involvement in the community are young people who experienced education or afterschool programming that is strongly focused on community involvement. Some of these participants attended a private, Catholic high school, whose mission statement and curriculum emphasizes the importance of serving others. Previous research points to

religious commitments as contributors to civic participation (Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007). Other participants were recruited from an after school academic and athletic program, which focuses on character development and volunteerism in addition to academic and athletic success. One student participates in the United States' largest student-run organization focused on civic engagement and community involvement. These young people have likely been influenced by the rhetoric of their educational and social environment, and understand the meaning of citizenship as it relates to their own experiences.

In particular, Jaden, Damon, and Jane, all aged 14, described citizenship as "helping." Aileen and Carly, aged 15, shared that "involvement" was key to citizenship. Mira, aged 15, also explained that part of citizenship is "helping the country thrive." Part of contributing to a "thriving" country is "wanting to participate," as Jackie, aged 16, says. This intrinsic motivation can drive young people to "keep our environment better for not just only for us, but for others," according to Grace, aged 16. Sachi, aged 17, describes several ways in which young people can improve the environment, and "make a difference" in the community. He shares, "cleaning the park will help your community because you're making the park nicer to go and visit. Or, you're... helping a candidate campaign for city council or something. So... you go door-knocking."

Young people also recognized that key to participation and involvement is awareness of what is "going on" in the community, as Carol, aged 17, puts it. Kenai, aged 14, says that although he does not pay attention to current affairs often, he believes citizens "pay attention to what's happening around you. Citizenship is not always being there a certain amount of time, it can just be paying attention or caring about the community or what's around you." Sachi introduces the idea of canvassing for local political candidates as a way to be involved and demonstrate one's care for the community and its future, and Elsie, also aged 17, concurs, and considers a citizen as someone who is "concerned about legal issues, political issues." This awareness can lead to young people "voicing [our] opinions, and thinking there's something that can change," Carol says. Allie, aged 15, expressed this element of voice, who believes "you can be part of something, but if you don't say what you feel or speak your voice, I don't think you're a citizen." For Allie, using one's voice is a crucial aspect of citizenship, a concept that will be addressed in Chapter Six. Section 5.2 will outline civic engagement, and what it

means to be an active citizen. The young people in this study understand and experience civic engagement in many different ways, which are often informed by how they conceptualize citizenship.

## **5.2 What Does it Mean to be Civically Engaged?**

The second component of civic identity refers to an individual's manner of engaging in their community or society. The findings presented in this section provide a deeper understanding of how young people conceptualize civic engagement in their own lives, which will contribute to a better understanding of young people's civic identity in practice. To prompt participants to think about civic engagement, I asked them what civic engagement meant to them. It was not unusual for the group of young people in this study to have not formally heard the term "civic engagement" prior to my interview with them, but it was also not difficult for them to describe the meaning of civic engagement in their own terms. Bibiana, aged 16, told me she had never heard the word "civic," but she deduced that civic engagement includes community involvement, and also believes civic engagement involves "knowing what's going on in the world, or in your area." Similarly, Naomi, also 16 years old, agreed: "Community service, I think... and then like... paying attention to what's going on, really. You don't have to be in depthly [sic] aware of everything that's happening in your town, but having a general knowledge of what's going on and what the issues are and how you could help."

The role of a citizen in a democratic society is to engage politically (Loader, 2007), but young people in this study demonstrate that civic engagement goes beyond, and in tandem with, political participation. For young people today, civic engagement largely includes community service, or volunteerism, which other studies have demonstrated can promote civic development in adolescence and lead to political participation later in life (Hart & Kirshner, 2009). Volunteering as a young person correlates with turning out to vote as an adult, as does young people's involvement in nonpolitical organizations – such as religious institutions, extracurricular clubs, and after school sports (McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Smith, 1999; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Involvement in these activities enables young people to develop civic skills, such as giving speeches or organizing meetings that they can apply to political causes later on (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Moreover, what is often considered to be traditional ways of engaging in politics

may not be relevant to young people. They are engaged, but in the ways that are accessible to them, and the ways that matter to them. Young people understand civic engagement at both a general level and a personal level, and as a function of the ways in which they understand citizenship. Young people offer examples of the general level of civic engagement as improving the community, interacting with others, and participating in the community democratically and politically.

The citizenship themes presented in Section 5.1 inform the illustrations that will come throughout Section 5.2. Young people who view citizenship as an emotional sense of belonging tend to think of civic engagement as improving the community or interacting with others. It is their sense of belonging that they feel within their community that makes them feel like they matter, and therefore want to give back to their immediate communities. Those with a view of citizenship as a legal status tend to think of civic engagement as democratic participation, which includes voting, petitioning, and canvassing for candidates for public office. Young people who believe that citizenship involves certain rights and privileges may feel more of a duty to exercise those rights and privileges by engaging in democratic participation. For those who understand citizenship as a combination of a sense of belonging and legal status view civic engagement as interacting with others and sharing one's voice and opinion. Those who think citizenship is age-defined tend to view civic engagement as improving the community through volunteerism, which includes community improvement activities that can be done at any and all ages. Finally, those who perceive citizenship as active involvement are inclined to think of civic engagement as a way to improve the community, and interact with others. This is a very active way of showing civic engagement.

The following sections present examples of the participants' own civic engagement activities, using the themes that outline how young people understand civic engagement: improving the community, interacting with others, and participating in the community democratically. In each of these understandings and experiences of civic engagement, technology has been used as a tool (Bennett, 2008; Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007; Montgomery, 2008). In contemporary society, we should now expect young people to organize their engagement activities around issues they truly care about (Earl

& Schussman, 2008), and these acts of engagement vary (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014).

### **5.2.1 Improving the Community**

An overwhelming majority of participants – 29 out of 46 participants – understood the general meaning of civic engagement to include some manner of improving the community. This theme is the foundation of Raynes-Goldie and Walker’s (2008) definition of civic engagement, presented in Chapters One and Two. Young people are concerned with benefiting others and the common good of the community, which is consistent with civic identity development among young people (McLeod, 2000).

Veronica, aged 15, believes “community is what builds your citizenship.” The following section illustrates that although young people commonly understood civic engagement to mean community improvement, the ways in which young people view and experience community improvement varies considerably, from participation in fundraising events, to actions to protect the environment, to volunteering their time for community service. What often draws young people into improving their community is the social connection that comes with it, especially participating in these activities with friends.

#### ***Participation in Fundraising Events***

Young people view fundraising as a means of improving their communities. Fundraising appeals to young people because it is a way to share support for a cause, or raise awareness about a particular issue. Fundraising campaigns are popular within American high schools, and often support foundations or charities related to medical research for specific diseases. Events such as Relay for Life, a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society, draw in classmates and community members to raise funds throughout the year. Nora, aged 15, donates to the Jimmy Fund, which raises money to support cancer care and research at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts, and Bibiana, aged 16, has participated in the Walk for Diabetes. Ava, aged 16, participates in local fundraisers for breast cancer research. Ava presents herself to others as an altruistic person, and cites that her personal community instilled in her the desire to help others. Ava says, “all people from [town] support... like if someone has breast cancer who is going through treatment, then they’ll help them, they’ll help

other people.” Similarly, Zelda, aged 14, saw a friend post on Facebook that her mother had beaten breast cancer. Zelda was “inspired” by that social media post to participate in a walk with her friends to raise awareness for breast cancer. Scholars have noted that civic engagement that is personally relevant is more motivating (Serriere, 2014), which may explain why Ava and Zelda have been motivated to participate in these fundraising events.

While Ava and Zelda have had personal experiences that led them to support breast cancer research, others learn about fundraising events through others, or through social media. Jane, aged 14, participated in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge in the summer of 2014. The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was a fundraising campaign that involved the filming of individuals pouring a bucket of ice water over their head, either by another person or on their own, and sharing the video on social media platforms to promote awareness of the disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)<sup>6</sup>. Participants were encouraged to make a donation to the ALS Association and nominate several other family members and friends to complete the challenge. Jane completed this challenge after discovering it on Instagram. The fundraising campaign went viral on social media, particularly on Instagram and Facebook – even celebrities were filmed pouring buckets of ice water on their heads before nominating other famous friends to complete the challenge. Part of what made this fundraiser so effective was its social nature: participants enjoyed being nominated to complete the challenge and encourage their other friends to become involved<sup>7</sup>.

Social networking sites continue to use this viral fundraising strategy. Carly, aged 16, notes “on Facebook I usually Like the cancer fundraisers or the walk, and you can volunteer.” Not only do Facebook and other social networking websites spread awareness of fundraising events, but today, Facebook also makes it possible to link one’s personal profile to a nonprofit or personal cause, and raise money for that cause (Facebook, 2018a). As Facebook notifies friend networks about one’s birthday, it is becoming increasingly popular for people to use their birthday as a campaign to raise

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<sup>6</sup> This campaign reinvigorated the research community studying ALS, and led to the discovery of a new gene tied to the disease (Rogers, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> In summer 2018, a campaign by the United Nations is based on the Ice Bucket Challenge model, and encourages people to pledge to reduce waste and environmental harm caused by single use plastic (Chow, 2018).

awareness and funds for a specific cause that they care about. It is as simple as clicking the “donate your birthday” link to create a Facebook fundraiser for any cause or charity (Veith, 2017). Friends who see the post can choose to donate, and can even Share the fundraising page to their own profile to expand the awareness for the fundraiser to their own social network, and encourage their social network to donate to their friend’s cause. Young people who wish to present themselves to others as charitable can choose to post these fundraisers to their Facebook profile, and advertise to others that they have contributed to fundraisers through Facebook. Evidently, social media impacted how young people think about and become involved in this sub-theme of civic engagement.

### ***Environmental Protection***

In an era in which climate change is a dominant social issue, young people also recognize that improving their community can include activities and actions that preserve and protect the natural environment. Kali, aged 16, participates in street cleaning in her neighborhood every year. She works with others to “clean up and pick up trash and do recycling and plant flowers in beds and stuff like that. And that is in itself, humbling, you know, taking care of your own environment.” Similarly, Addie, aged 14, collects trash and makes sure she recycles. Young people can be motivated to engage in community service projects if their friends are participating, too (Flanagan, 2013). Zelda, aged 14, participates in an annual event to pick up rubbish along the Charles River, an activity that Zelda finds enjoyable because it is something she can do with her friends. This experience illustrates what Goffmann (1959; 1978) and Schlenker (2012) described in their theories of identity: one presents the self in the way they wish to be perceived by others. Zelda demonstrates to her friends that she values her local environment, and presents herself as such. In turn, her friends wish to be seen in the same light, and participate in these cleanup days. The schools and after school programs from which participants in this study were recruited promote the community cleanup initiatives that Kali, Addie, and Zelda mentioned.

While choosing lifestyles and activities that promote waste reduction and keeps the immediate environment free from litter, environmental protection on a larger scale includes talking about environmental issues with others. Mira, aged 15, attends climate rallies because she believes it is important to “stand up for the fight that I want climate

change to stop” and that her participation in these rallies will improve her community. Kali, Addie, Zelda, and Mira all demonstrate that youth care about issues of public concern, like civil rights and environmental concerns (Mesch & Coleman, 2007). Within this theme of environmental protection, technology did not play a role in how young people were conceiving of this idea or participating in this form of civic engagement.

### ***Volunteerism***

Young people also believe it is important to serve their community by giving their time to individuals, or to more specific communities. In most cases, young people learn about volunteer opportunities through their school, and various clubs and organizations in which they are involved, especially those organizations that are oriented toward community service. Some community service is geared toward young people’s immediate community. For example, Jillian, aged 15, enjoys volunteering at her dance studio and walking dogs in her neighborhood, and Camille, also aged 15, helps the elderly in her neighborhood. In the winter, especially, Camille will “shovel snow because the elderly can’t do it for themselves.”

More broadly, young people seek opportunities to help those in their larger cities or towns. Selah, aged 15, volunteers at homeless shelters. Through her school, she is an active member of “Club Four, in which you volunteer at homeless shelters. You are able to volunteer or you can make the meal plan and there’s a lot of different people at the homeless shelter, and talking to them really just brings a new perspective into me.” Selah highlights the positive effect that her contribution to the homeless shelter has on her: the feeling of connecting to others. Carol, aged 17, shared that she was a part of a program that challenged students to devise a way to improve the community. Her group recognized that in their neighborhood, there are “a lot of abandoned buildings,” and they thought, “we can use those abandoned buildings, make them for people to get tutored and stuff like that.” In her community, “there’s a lot of kids on the streets. So we need to find a way to get them off the streets.” Carol and her peers believed that spending the time to devise this proposal to repurpose the abandoned buildings for education and tutoring would be a way to meet their goal and improve the community overall. As the experiences of the participants suggest, volunteerism often takes place in a face-to-face

environment. As such, technology did not influence this sub-theme of civic engagement in the same way it had with participation in fundraising events.

### **5.2.2 Interacting with Others**

A smaller number of participants viewed civic engagement as something that could be done through interaction with others, namely, sharing opinions and experiences. For many young people, these sorts of interactions can occur at any point in the day, often through technology and social media. Grace, aged 16, believes that sharing experiences with others and learning from other's experiences is a way of improving the community: "Even the way we... post something on Facebook or Instagram, it's kind of a way of showing my life or my experience with others. Maybe others saw your post... they will know what you thought and maybe your thought will converse their opinion about these things." Grace acknowledges that people post different things on social media – photos, stories, news articles – and that social media can be a way for people to learn about others and their beliefs through these different Shared posts. Laura, aged 17, agrees, "publicly posting" her opinion on social media is a way for her to be civically engaged, and a way for her to present herself to others by sharing her political views with others.

Allie, aged 16, believes that voicing your opinions can improve the community: "you have to be able to say what you think, and not be silent." Veronica, aged 15, would agree. She believes it is important to "give input" and interact with others to improve the community by sharing ideas. Camille, aged 15, believes that it's possible to share your opinion "through people, or through social media, I guess. By spreading the message, others will see it." As Camille alludes, taking concerns to social media can range from posting political thoughts, to sharing news articles about current political and social issues, to "cyberprotesting," which reflects the concerns of young citizens (Loader, 2007, p. 10).

In addition to sharing political news articles online, Elsie, aged 17, participates in the Junior State of America, the largest student-run organization in the United States. Through this organization, Elsie finds it possible to "have discourse with people. It's very important to me to find people who have different views than me and try to discuss things with them." The Junior State of America brings secondary school students

together at conventions throughout the academic year to discuss salient current events and political issues. During the school year, individual school chapters of the organization provide students with the opportunity to learn and engage in parliamentary style debate to prepare them for discussions at these larger conventions. Elsie has been a part of this program throughout her secondary school years, and has found that it connects her to people who hold different views from hers, and empowers her to learn from others by discussing political and social issues.

### **5.2.3 Political Participation**

The final way in which young people understand civic engagement is political participation, particularly through voting and protesting. For participants who define civic engagement in this way, many of them acknowledged the limitations of their age on their ability to become civically engaged in this manner. Imani, aged 14, believes that young people's "priorities are different" because "most of my friends can't vote and neither can I. But maybe if I was able to, then I would be more involved in it because I'd want to know who I'm voting for and why I'm voting for them if I agree with what they are saying." Imani suggests that she will follow politics more and become civically engaged by voting when she gets closer to voting age. Kevin, aged 15, agrees, and does not participate in politics yet because "I still have a lot of things to learn, I still have a lot of things to try to do before I can really like, affect other people."

Stephen, aged 14, has wanted to participate politically, but shared that he is not able to "do any of that stuff, considering most of those you have to be like, over 18 to do... But it feels good to be able to get my own point of view out there. As a kid, I just have to let all the adults make the choices for me, instead of my own views getting out of there." Stephen struggles to find his voice and share his voice with others, and believes that he must let adults make decisions for him. Stephen says that theoretically, for his voice to be heard, he would "need supporters and people who understand my view to be behind me." In contemporary society, the supporters that Stephen alludes to could be Followers on social media, friends from school, family members, and teachers.

Stephen yearns for his voice to "count," and longs for the day that he can vote. Sometimes, the closest young people come to voting before they reach age 18 is by

discussing elections with adults in their lives who are able to vote, and consider young people's views when they decide who to vote for. Bethany, aged 14, helped her mother, who is not fluent in English, make an informed decision about voting in an election. Bethany shared that she completed her high school "Civics course last year, so, I had to research; I understood what was being taught to me, so I told my mom ... because she had to vote, she wanted to vote, and she had no idea. So, told her the standings of each candidate and I kind of helped like, pers--... like, told her what they were gonna do. So then she could make a decision." Civics courses do indeed enhance civic knowledge (Niemi & Junn, 1998), and Bethany used this knowledge to help educate her mother about the candidates that she could choose to vote for. Hannah, aged 16, and Mira, aged 15, also discussed influencing their parents to vote in a certain way that would reflect their own views. These young people's actions also confirms results by Mesch and Coleman (2007), who have found that young people have tried to influence the voting behavior of others as a means of exercising their own voice.

Yet, while Stephen felt disempowered, Maisie, aged 14, had the opportunity to participate in her town's budget vote, wherein "anybody over the age of twelve can vote to decide what the budget this year is going to be focused on." Maisie discussed several options that the city budget could be allocated towards, including "making more bike lanes, or improving stuff in the youth centers." Kenai, also 14 years old, participated in a similar initiative at his school. He described it as, "a ballot that they give out in schools, it's like a green ballot, and you get to vote what... where you want a million dollars to go. Like what projects you'd want it to go to. I forgot what it's called. But you can vote for like, outside wireless connections, more green space, stuff like that." Maisie's vote impacted her town, and Kenai's vote impacted his school.

Participation in formal democratic institutions through procedures, such as voting, has been criticized for not yielding the increased sense of self-efficacy that young people need in order to become civically engaged in the future (Loader, 2007). Age restrictions are codified in laws, making voting limited to individuals over age 18 (Camino & Zeldin, 2002), yet there are other ways in which young people can participate democratically without voting, such as protesting. Jaden, aged 14, asserts, "if you don't like something, protest, take a stand." That is exactly what Sachi, aged 17, has done since childhood. Sachi describes his personal value that it is important to stand up for

one's beliefs. When Sachi was six or seven years old, he participated in rallies and protests with his parents to try to keep his elementary school from closing: "We'd go and camp in the square at night just to show that we wanted it open. All the rallies and like, people coming together... I think that showed a lot of strength." As a result, he says he is the type of person who will fight for what he believes in. Sachi's interest in politics began through participating in these types of rallies, and his upbringing. His mother is a political science teacher, and Sachi explains she "helped me guide my path." As Sachi described his own actions, he believes that actions to show civic engagement include going to a protest, helping strangers, being a "good Samaritan." Sachi himself considered himself to be civically engaged when he was younger and had more time, but now he tries to get involved in church and his after school sports program. Sachi's civic experiences are recorded in the participant vignette presented in Appendix H.

### ***Young Activists at Work: The Case of School Walkouts***

Sachi's childhood protest experience in a neighboring town to Boston precluded a contemporary protest in Boston. The city faced a proposed cut to the school district's budget, and the young people affected by this policy harbored complex thoughts regarding the most appropriate course of action to protest the budget cuts. Robert, aged 16, understood the budget cuts as "they're trying to take, I don't even remember how much, but it was like millions out of the school budget to give it to private schools to fund them." In protest of the budget cuts, Robert shares:

A lot of schools will have walkouts. So you have a certain time to just get up, get out of school, go meet at Faneuil Hall or something. And ... a lot of people don't go to that. It shows, 'Oh, you really don't care about your education or anything or your future.' So like... Or even like, your siblings'. 'Cause like, if they cut your siblings' ... if they take money out of our budget, your siblings won't have like, a better education or anything like that.

Robert discusses how presenting oneself and one's opinions in this matter is important to him: he has participated in every walkout. He said, "It was really interesting. It was mind-blowing to see that many young teenagers just being out there and speaking their mind. And showing they actually care about their education and the future of their family members and everything else." Robert refers to his peers who choose to keep their opinion on the school budget cuts private and do not act on them. He believes that

it reflects positively on himself to demonstrate that he values his education and his future by participating in the protest.

Jaden, aged 14, agreed that the walkout was an important way to make his voice heard: “if you don’t like something, like, for example, the fund for schools were gonna go down. And people didn’t like that. So, we did a walkout... just like, taking a stand.”

Gwen, aged 18, shared that the initiative for the walkouts “was all over Twitter and Facebook and everywhere, everyone had to Share it and you had to walk out of the school in order to protest the budget cuts. So I guess that inspired me, and everybody else who all walked out of school. And we went to City Hall and we made posters, and stuff. And we protested.” Young people of Boston used social media to organize, and exerted their collective agency to pool knowledge, skills, and resources together to effect change – or at least gain some visibility (Bandura, 2008).

Habibah, aged 16, discussed the effect of young people gathering together for this type of action. She says, “Usually children get overlooked” and that young people’s voices “don’t really weigh a lot.” Habibah reflected on the walkouts and said that the media reports demonstrated that adults “were really moved by the amount of people” who participated. Habibah revealed a sense of despair when she notes,

The thing is, sure you can be moved by the amount of people, but I feel like they’re still gonna do what they wanna do. Like, they could say, ‘oh yeah, we were moved,’ and there was a huge amount of people, but I still feel like they’re gonna do what they wanna do, so like, the reason why they will do what they wanna do is if somebody within their community speaks up. Like, ‘oh you know, but the way, I feel like this is gonna not only affect the children but also affect us.’ Like, that’s the only time they will actually [inaudible] situation, not just like, change their minds.

Habibah seems to have wanted to experience a greater sense of efficacy after learning that adults were “moved” by how many students walked out of their schools to protest the budget cuts. But Habibah still believes that the adults will only make a change if other adults will be affected. This is not the sort of positive reinforcement that might encourage Habibah – and her peers – to participate in civic action again in the future.

Several participants opted out of participating in the walkouts. Surprisingly, Sachi, aged 17, has “tried to stay out of” the walkouts, because he believes that there should not be budget cuts in the first place: budget cuts are just a symptom of a larger problem of “what’s happening in the school system.” While Sachi believed that a different approach would change education in his school district, Tanesha, aged 16, chose not to participate in the walkouts because she believes that the manner in which her peers approached the budget cut issue by walking out was the wrong way to go about a protest. Tanesha suggested that a better method of protesting school budget cuts “would be to sit in. Because by you walking out, you’re showing you don’t care about budget cuts in your education. So it’s just like, a lot of people don’t know exactly the way to protest. I think they’re just trying things out and seeing what works, because at the moment, it’s not working.” Tanesha is concerned that her younger peers “don’t listen” and are “stubborn, harder to make listen.” While Tanesha views those younger than her as “stubborn,” she does acknowledge the positive action, that her peers are “trying things out and seeing what works,” and hopes they will continue to find effective ways to take civic action. These young people exemplify that individuals use whatever tools are available to them in order to undertake their chosen civic action (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013) – in the case of the school walkouts, this was a Facebook event to spread the word about this protest.

### **5.3 Understanding Civic Identity in Contemporary Society**

This chapter has provided a basis for a new understanding of young people’s civic identity through the ways in which young people in this study understand citizenship and civic engagement. How young people think of themselves as citizens and how they present themselves to others as active citizens through civic engagement is influenced by how others perceive them (Schlenker, 2012). For example, when young people feel their citizenship is restricted by their age, young people reveal their frustration for society’s perception of them as incapable or unwilling to engage. Laura expressed her disappointment that she is not able to participate in certain volunteer activities, and Naomi revealed that citizenship ought to be less about age and more about a sense of responsibility. As in Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox’s (2005) findings, the five themes of citizenship that emerged from this study are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for young people to draw on the different themes simultaneously as they reflect on their understanding of what citizenship means to them.

In the 15 years since Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox's (2003; 2005) research was first published, there have been many technological developments that could influence how young people see themselves fitting into the world around them, and how young people view themselves as citizens. However, despite these developments, technology itself does not seem to directly affect young people's understandings of citizenship. Rather, technology informs and shapes the experiences that young people have related to citizenship and civic engagement. While technology has informed how people engage with news and learn about issues of public concern, such as the immigration debate, technology itself does not seem to impact young people's direct viewpoints on what it means to be a citizen.

Furthermore, despite the existence of technology in their everyday lives, technology does not play as large a role in young people's understanding and experiences of citizenship as I expected from the outset of this study. This might be because civics curriculum in the United States is not only lacking in quantity, but it also does not address the ways that young people can be civically engaged by harnessing technological tools. During the data collection phase of this study, I interacted with several officials in a large school district's Office of Data and Accountability, the office responsible for approving or rejecting research proposals within the school district. I received a voicemail from one of the officials in this office that stated "civic education is not a priority for [school district]." This spokesperson for the school district made it clear that civic education is low on the priority list for this district, especially. If this is the case in this district from which one third of participants were recruited for this study, it is possible to assume that Social Studies curriculum in this district and elsewhere is lacking in civics education and also lacking in an update to how civic education could include technologically enhanced activities for civic engagement. Young people have discovered tools for civic engagement on their own (i.e., finding out about the school walkout on Facebook, posting on Instagram about Black Lives Matter).

This study enhances the findings on citizenship put forth by Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003; 2005), and contributes the discovery that young people conceptualize civic engagement much in the same way as scholars do, with civic activities that include service-oriented endeavors, political participation, and "activism activities in which

youth engage to improve their worlds” (Weinstein, 2014, p. 212). In most cases, young people’s understandings of citizenship were informed by their experiences in their own lives, such as the immigration debate that pervades public discourse. This issue of public concern may have shaped young people’s views on citizenship, and the acquisition of news information online may have shaped young people’s awareness of this public debate. The findings presented in this chapter illustrate that understandings and experiences of citizenship and civic engagement must be viewed together as civic identity. A new framework for civic identity will be presented in Chapter Seven.

As the findings in this chapter demonstrate, young people think about citizenship in more nuanced ways compared to the participants in Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox’s (2003; 2005) research, and there is more emotion, conviction, and personal voice involved in shaping these understandings, because of the personalization of politics (Mesch & Coleman, 2007). While Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox’s (2003) findings focused on the ages at which young people grasp the understanding of each of the citizenship models, in this study, age is relevant only as a parameter by which young people assess their eligibility for citizenship and its rights and responsibilities. In their current life stage, some young people question whether they are citizens because they have not reached the age at which they have the power or responsibility to make decisions and have their voices heard.

This chapter illustrated a preview of how the Internet and social media are involved in civic engagement, and how social media informs young people about different ways in which they can become more involved in their community, whether that is participating in a fundraiser for ALS research, or learning about a school walkout. The Internet and social media are not the *prominent* means through which young people are developing their understandings of citizenship and engaging civically, but they are still contributors. The *reciprocity hypothesis* of technology’s relationship to civic engagement that was described in Chapter Two has appeared through the findings of this study presented in this chapter. Civic engagement activities that are digitally mediated tend to mirror the activities that young people are taking part in without technology (Nam, 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014), such as participating in fundraising events, interacting with others, and engaging in protests. Importantly, the themes that emerged from the data illustrate that young people view civic engagement in the more traditional sense of the term, through

improving the community, interacting with others, and participating politically. The digitally mediated aspects of daily life that play into civic engagement lie primarily in fundraising events like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and political protests like the school walkout. Young people became aware of these events through social media, and without social media, might have heard of these events through word of mouth.

As noted in Section 5.2, young people believe that paying attention to current events is a form of civic engagement. I had expected technology to influence participants' ideas and experience of civic engagement because young people are constrained by their parents and schools, and technology may give young people an outlet or platform from which to share their voice, as scholars have suggested (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010). However, that been the case for just a few of the participants in this study. Only a few young people mention technology as a way to express their voice, which will be more deeply discussed in Chapter Six. Chapter Six will highlight specific examples of how young people are participating in civic life in contemporary society, highlighting the changing means through which young people are discussing current events, and how social and institutional structures impact their sense of self-efficacy.

## **Chapter Six | Findings**

# **Engaging in the Political World**

The findings presented in Chapters Four and Five revealed that how one sees oneself fitting into and contributing to a group or larger society impacts how one presents the self to that group (Schlenker, 2012), which is normally by improving their communities. Chapter Five described the relation between young people’s conceptualizations of citizenship and their understandings of civic engagement, which informs a new framework of civic identity. With the understanding of how young people grasp civic engagement, it is now possible to learn how young people are developing and using their civic identity and voices to engage in today’s political world. Young people are making sense of the information that surrounds them in the form of current events from both traditional and new media sources, developing a sense of who they are politically and synthesizing this information as they decide to affiliate with a political party and develop their own political voice. This chapter will explore how young people are developing and sharing their political beliefs with others, and the importance of feeling that one’s voice – an outward expression of civic identity – is heard.

### **6.1 Building Voice in Contemporary Society**

Voice is an expression of one’s civic identity – it is a way of sharing one’s opinions and beliefs from their position in a community and their actions of civic engagement. The data from this study reveal that voice is a tangible expression of one’s civic identity and belief system. This section will describe how voice is developed. Young people can develop their voices through learning about information from the media and from others, and synthesizing that information to build their voice and, in turn, efficacy.

Media exposure (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001) and social modeling can build efficacy (Bandura, 2008), and successful experiences in sharing voice can lead to young people continuing these actions (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012). In the digital era, young people can look up to trusted adults in their lives as well as strangers they connect with digitally (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). People can model nearly anyone including strangers, because the ideas, belief systems, and lifestyles are frequently transmitted through social media. Parents and teachers are often the first models of civic engagement that young people see, and can model civic behavior and tell their children or students when they engage civically, for example when they vote or when they participate in a protest (Serriere, 2014). As civic engagement is a learned capacity (Dias & Menezes, 2014), young people require role models to demonstrate acts of civic engagement (Bandura, 2008; Kieffer, 1984).

Young people build voice by following current events, learning from trusted adults, and choosing a political party. Their interest in following current events and developing opinions on issues of public concern is affected by their news consumption habits at home and in their daily lives outside of the home. At the time of this study, such current events include the 2016 presidential election in the United States. Young people in this study choose to learn from adults who are more informed about their own political views as a way for them to situate their own views within the political system of the United States. How young people see politics and political issues in the media, and how trusted adults discuss these issues, may influence how young people understand what is going on in the world around them, and their beliefs about the two political parties that dominate the United States' political system (McLeod, 2000). The following sections will illustrate how young people experience these factors as they build their voice and decide whether to share that voice with others.

### **6.1.1 Paying Attention to Current Events**

Young people are developing their own civic identity and voice, and as they are doing so, they are interacting with information and people to understand current events and form their opinions of these issues of public concern. This section will illustrate how following current events contributes to building youth voice. Consuming news information is no longer considered a passive political activity (Krueger, 2002); rather,

it is an active political activity (Katz & Rice, 2002), which underpins the extent to which people become politically informed (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018). Young people are actively taking in the information about the world around them, and learning to make sense of it. As illustrated in Chapter Five, young people believe that paying attention to current events and being well informed about what is going on in the world around them is a facet of civic engagement. Paying attention to current events exposes young people to different viewpoints on prominent issues, and enables them to understand their own positions on these issues and develop their voice. Nevertheless, expectations of young people to keep up with current events are low (Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007), and these limited expectations of young people contribute to their overall sense of efficacy.

Nora, aged 15, is one of few participants who chooses not to pay attention to the news, and says that is because the news often saddens her: “[There are] a lot of bad things happening. And I don’t really like to hear that stuff. I want to hear happy things...and the news doesn’t really give out anything happy.” Similarly, Mira, aged 15, personifies the stereotype that teenagers prefer to “look at the comics unless there is something interesting on the front page” of the newspaper. Despite these outliers, most participants expressed that they *do* follow current events, even though they realize that society does not expect them to do so at this stage in life. Maisie, aged 14, emphasizes that it is important for young people to be informed about current events, no matter how good or “bad” the events may seem.

Ava, aged 16, says that she learns most news “through my friends” who will be “texting ‘Oh, did you see what just happened?’” Ava also shares that “Twitter is a big news thing, and I have one so I always check that for something” but she will occasionally learn something from her mother who “still gets a newspaper.” Ava highlights how traditional and new media are used in her daily life to keep her informed of current events. Participants in this study followed current events in digitally mediated ways, from the traditional nightly news on television to the constant influx of current events information in the form of online newspapers and Twitter alerts. Participants were most interested in the current events that impact them – directly or indirectly – in their neighborhoods and school districts.

Often, young people tend to follow current events to which they are connected personally. When she thinks of current events, Bibiana, aged 16, considers what is happening in her own neighborhood. During our first interview, she recalled a recent time when she arrived home from school, and “the block near my apartment was barricaded and there was police and stuff. I guess some guy was trying to hold people captive there, and it was really dangerous. I feel like that’s what I think of when I hear ‘current events,’ because you would see, ‘Oh, there’s been a shooting in [neighborhood],’ which has a bunch of roses laid out for people who have died there.” Bibiana’s community discusses these current events. Bibiana believes it is “really important, because it could have been like, someone who you’re really close to. It could have been your brother, or your little sister or something like that. And it’s always someone else’s family member that has been hurt.” Bibiana’s connection to her community, which she described as “like a family,” gives her a strong sense of purpose to stay informed about the events that are happening around her and to talk about these events. Civic scholars have found that people engage with issues that are embedded in their everyday life (Ke & Starkey, 2014), and Bibiana’s personal example of current events in her own community demonstrates the concerns of many young people in underserved areas throughout the United States. Participants from wealthier, more stable communities discussed fundraisers as examples of current events, illustrating the stark difference in issues at the forefront of young people’s minds in different communities, a finding supported by Hart and Kirshner (2009).

Young people have many explanations for why they do or do not pay attention to current events: some participants do not pay attention to current events because they are not yet of voting age, and feel that politics is not relevant to them. Yet others understand that they are nearing voting age, so it would better serve them to pay attention to current events now to keep them as informed as possible before sharing their voices through votes in the future. Following current events may go hand in hand with sharing their voices on political and social issues – young people may hear about a current event, and wish to discuss it in more detail with others. The ways in which young people pay attention to current events varies, but is often motivated by what they see at home, and what is convenient for them within their daily lives. The next sections will outline the news consumption habits within participants’ homes, as well as how young people are gathering news information in digitally mediated ways.

### ***Picking Up News Consumption Habits at Home***

It is common for young people to consume news information through traditional news media, like television news and newspapers, as well as through social media. These news consumption behaviors and interests start in the home and within family contexts, especially if parents or other relatives pay attention to the news. Hannah, aged 16, says that her mother “likes to watch Channel 7 really loudly” and that she comes from “a political family. My dad was in the Marines, and my uncle was in the Army, so when my uncle comes to visit, they’ll have political debates.” Just as Hannah’s family context shapes her consumption of news, so does Jane’s. Jane, aged 14, says that the most engaged she is with current events and news is when her “grandmother watches the news.” Sometimes, this activity inspires her to read more about a current political issue. Similarly, Allie, aged 15, will “look up things at home” after hearing her teacher or father talk about a current event. Allie shares that her teachers raise questions about topics in the news: “In Theology we’re learning about Syria or what the land was... then [the teacher] brought up Syria today, and he was talking about that really briefly, but then I looked it up later and I thought it was kind of interesting and sad, what was going on.” Hearing others – especially adults with whom young people have a trusting relationship – discuss current events often prompts young people to want to learn more, and conduct research online to discover more information to develop their own views about issues of public concern. Many participants watch television news to get their information, which increases their civic and political knowledge (McLeod, 2000), and, in turn, their confidence in sharing their voice and beliefs about these issues (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003).

As young people learn how to access news information from their family members and close adults in their lives, they also learn skills about interpreting news information. Addie, aged 14, learned from her mother about how to understand the news. Addie’s mother told her “news always has a bias, so she said just ‘listen to the facts.’ So that’s what I mostly try to do. But I don’t usually listen to what the news reporter is saying. I watch the actual election to make my own opinions.” Addie’s comments, and her mother’s lessons, have become particularly relevant at the time of writing, as the issue of “fake news” and the dissemination of disinformation came to light after the data collection process for this study, which was completed in advance of the 2016

presidential election. Addie tries to ignore the bias given by political analysts, and understands the election results by looking at the election returns herself. Discussions with family, teachers, peers, and others can mediate the bias embedded in mass communication and broaden young people's understanding of political and social issues (Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009). As Addie begins to think critically about the bias she sees on television, Tanesha will illustrate in the following section that young people may have these mediating experiences on websites such as Tumblr, where people are able to post their views and re-post others' content when they want to present their views to others. Evidently, the home is no longer the primary place for young people to learn habits of consuming news and become informed about political affairs and learn about the nuances within social issues (McLeod & Shah, 2009) to build and voice their opinions on these issues. Twitter, Tumblr, and other social networking websites and online news sources have become central means through which young people are learning about the news and developing their news consumption habits.

### ***Integrating News Consumption Habits into Daily Life***

As expressed throughout this thesis, young people's lives are digitally mediated, and young people care most about the issues that are directly relevant to them. Sachi, aged 17, turns to "Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook" to access information about what is going on in his community and the wider world, and asserts, "I don't really use anything else other than those, to just look at what's happening, or what's going on in my community." It is not surprising that young people, like Sachi, get their news information in digitally mediated ways that are relevant and convenient to them (Linton, 2015), such as through social media, which are a source of political information and a venue for political expression (Shah, Cho, Eveland, Jr., & Kwak, 2005). People of all ages now use social media as a part of gathering information about current events (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland, & Bimber, 2013; Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013; Pasek, More, & Romer, 2009; Towner, 2013). With 67 per cent of Americans getting their news information from social media (Gottfried & Shearer, 2017), it is not surprising that growing evidence points to social media as a primary means of young people's access to political information (Sloam, Ehsan, & Henn, 2018).

Kaitlyn, aged 16, watches the news on television “in the morning, and then it’s on my Twitter and Instagram, so I’ll see stuff throughout the day.” Social media enables people to stay informed at every moment of the day – information can be accessed from one’s smart device with the swipe of a finger. Generally, participants often cited that they are “busy” and rarely have time to follow current events, but that technology has helped them stay informed throughout the day. Jillian, aged 15, is often busy with homework and dance class in the evenings and therefore does not use her smartphone at those times. But, “the next day I’ll hear something, or I’ll go onto my phone and it’ll be blowing up with Twitter notifications, and people texting me if I saw this, or if I saw that.” For Jillian, it seems like her smartphone is her lifeline for learning about current events. Her friends will inform her via text message, or she will receive notifications on her phone from Twitter. All Jillian has to do is look at her phone and she will be up to date on the major headlines of the day.

Tanesha, aged 16, actively seeks information about politics and current events because she wants to learn how to “take it all in.” Tanesha prefers to access her news information from print sources, not online, which is unique for this age group, but also relies on television and electronic news media such as CNN and Apple News “just for the political aspect” each morning. Throughout the day, she reflects and forms her opinion about what is going on, and then before she goes to bed, she looks at Tumblr to read others’ opinions about the current events. Tanesha, in accordance with the view of civic engagement as interaction with others and making one’s voice heard, believes that people should be exposed to more viewpoints so they can be “vocal” which “makes change.” Tanesha values the opinions of others and integrates them into her own worldview by reading Tumblr pages related to current events. Kaitlyn and Tanesha demonstrate further examples of young people’s unbroken connection to their digital devices throughout the day. A recent report from the Pew Research Center demonstrates that some youth even admit they are almost constantly using their digital devices (Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker, 2015); their technology and social media are the first thing they check in the morning, and the last thing they check before they go to sleep at night (Watkins, 2009).

Kenai, aged 14, does not follow current events every day, but uses an app on his phone called “Flipboard, which shows highlights on the news.” While Kenai is not constantly

connected to his social media, he does acknowledge that social media has become integrated into politics much more as time goes on. When he thinks about contemporary elections, he thinks of “long speeches, huge crowds ... people spamming on Twitter what they think.” Kenai’s statement highlights how social media has afforded many with a platform for their voices and opinions to be heard. The current election cycle has made one candidate infamous for using Twitter to insult others, which will be addressed later in this chapter. Sean, aged 15, also notes that social media is incorporated into political campaigns: “I think relating technology and politics is important to see the connection between how technology has impacted the way people hear about and talk about the election. It’s easier to send one message to the entire public.” Sean understands the influence of social media in disseminating information and amplifying voices, and shares how he knows politicians harness the power of social media to influence constituents during election campaigns.

All of the aforementioned accounts demonstrate that technology plays a role in how young people experience the world (boyd, 2009), and may offer new opportunities for young people to share their voices and participate in civic life. For Bibiana, social media has impacted her consumption of news about societal issues, and her career aspirations. For Bibiana, social media is a source of intrigue and information about what is going on in the world. Bibiana relates her civic engagement to how social media keeps her informed, a correlation that has also been identified by scholars (Shea & Green, 2007). Bibiana asserts, “I would be less involved if I didn’t have social media” and highlights the power of “people from around the world saying something and coming together for a cause.” She feels that “social media has shaped me to become more aware ... Not on like political issues, but more of like, societal issues.” Bibiana’s story represents several ways in which young people’s civic experiences are digitally mediated: social media offers new opportunities for young people to contribute to a community, and as a way to learn about current events. Bibiana identified how exactly social media has made her more aware, and how it has changed her attitudes about following current events. Bibiana is now more interested in current events, and hopes to pursue a career in journalism.

### ***Following the 2016 Presidential Election***

The 2016 presidential election dominated public conversation during the time of data collection. A majority of the young people in this study said they followed developments in the election campaign; very few young people are completely uninformed about current events or politics. One such participant is Laura, aged 17. She says politics and current events are “not relevant” to her, but when she turns “eighteen I probably will [pay attention to current events], just because... obviously it is relevant to me because I’m a United States citizen. But overall, I can’t ... it doesn’t seem that relevant for me to follow if I can’t vote for anybody or I can’t help figure out what they want to do about passing a certain law or not.” Laura’s age precludes her from following current events because she feels she cannot do anything – she is not yet eligible to vote.

Carly, aged 15, refutes adults’ perception that young people do not want to pay attention to politics because it is difficult for young people to understand. She says, “politics kind of confuses me, but that doesn’t make me not want to watch it.” Several participants mention that current events, especially the presidential election, are topics of discussion in Humanities and Social Studies classes at school, and in the home. Selah, aged 15, says, “I haven’t watched much of the debates, but I always hear my homeroom teacher talking about it. And she’s also a history teacher, so I definitely trust her.” Selah’s teacher is in a position of trust and power, which influences Selah’s understanding of current events. Damon, aged 14, says that his Humanities class discusses the election, and “who is highest in the polls.” Similarly, Ava, aged 16, says that she discusses current events in her Social Studies class. In other cases, the discussions about the election begin in the home. Kevin, aged 15, shares, “most of the time, it starts with me, and sometimes I’m with one of my uncles, watching the news, and something pops up about the presidential election, and he just starts talking about it...And we just get that conversation going, and other people join in.”

Zelda, aged 14, enjoys watching the debates between the presidential candidates because she finds them “really funny and... really interesting.” Zelda describes that she has gathered that there is so much “to learn about politics and government.” Zelda was most able to recall what the candidates post on Twitter: “Donald Trump sometimes says

what he'll do if he's the U.S. president. Or... insults Hillary Clinton." Zelda notes that after watching the debates, and reading what candidates post on their Twitter pages, the candidates highlight "the same things, but someone puts it better... they say it better. If Donald Trump says, 'I want to build the Mexican border over again,' Hillary Clinton will say, maybe say the same thing, but he'll make it sound more like... powerful." Zelda describes how each candidate appeals to certain voters through their rhetoric, and topics they bring to the forefront of political debate. "Donald Trump has one to three ideas that everyone seems to like. Like, ISIS and then the Mexican border. A lot of people think that should change. But Hilary Clinton, she has a lot of different ideas, but she's not making a really big effort to do every single one of them. She'll ... pick a couple... and then she'll emphasize how that will impact the U.S." Zelda considers how the candidates present themselves, and notes the use of social media in this election campaign. Several other participants used this time in our interview to critique how candidates have utilized their social media to connect with the public – particularly Donald Trump.

Naomi, aged 16, shares, "I don't like Donald Trump... he's a grown man and he's willing to stoop to social media to insult someone." Naomi notes the juvenile nature of this tactic, and highlights that she has "sixteen-year-old friends who do that, so to me the person who's supposed to be running my country and keeping me safe shouldn't be insulting someone on Twitter." Naomi asserts that some of her peers are more mature than the person running for President of the United States. Martin, aged 15, notes that while social media is a way for people – including presidential candidates – to express themselves, this freedom can have both positive and negative consequences. Publicly sharing beliefs can bring people closer together by facilitating communication and breaking barriers between public figures and everyday people, but it can also lead to people abusing that freedom and using social media to bully or insult others, as Naomi suggests Donald Trump has done. With freedom on social media, Martin claims, "you can't tell somebody not to do this or that.... They might send out a picture, throw some shade.... You know, they might say something about somebody else, like, subliminally. I think the freedom is a great thing, but ... after awhile you get power-hungry and you lose yourself and the power, and you lose it completely." Martin speaks to the way social media gives people a voice – but that voice might not always be sharing positive ideas. Sachi pointed this out as well, the fact that politicians and political candidates use

social media as a tool to acquire votes, and “insults work.” Other participants mentioned their view of the 2016 presidential candidates insulting each other as “immature” or “childish,” but few participants went so far as to say, “it seems like it works for that candidate,” as Sachi concluded.

Young people are well informed to consider the candidates for President, and have learned about the status of the election in digitally mediated ways. Kaitlyn, aged 16, shared concerns as “these people [presidential candidates] could be the future of our country. So ... since I’ll be eighteen soon, I’m interested in knowing what their beliefs are and how they could help us.” Her peers of age 16 do not believe they are close enough to voting that it is necessary to pay attention to the election, but, as young people grow closer to voting age, they become more likely to pay attention to current events, and the 2016 presidential election. In many cases, the 17-year-old participants in this study would be eligible to vote in the 2016 election. Kaitlyn, Peter, Sachi, and Elsie all determined that it is important for them to be informed in the present, so that they know their views and understand which candidates and policies would best represent them and their voices when they are able to vote.

While some young people are close enough to the voting age that they choose to pay attention to the election coverage, others follow the election in order to learn more about the diversity of political beliefs within the United States, as a way of informing their own beliefs and views about the country. Aidan, aged 15, shared his surprise about “the amount of people that support [Trump],” which “kind of wakes you up and shows you how the different parts ... how like, different people are ... and it kinda makes you think...politically-wise, as a country, we’re not really diverse at all.” Aidan explains that there are so many people in the “Southern and Central” United States who support Donald Trump’s promise to “build a wall between Mexico and the U.S.” but “there’s a lot of people on the coasts that just... don’t. So there’s politically like safe [areas] for a Republican country or Democratic country.” Aidan has learned about the political diversity of the country, just by paying attention to the coverage of the 2016 presidential election. By following the presidential election, these young people have synthesized the opinions and beliefs of the candidates to help them establish their own position on the candidates and the issues of public concern. As the next section will illustrate, young

people are learning more about the political beliefs around them, and developing their own, through discussions with trusted adults.

### **6.1.2 Learning from Trusted Adults**

Young people talk about issues of public concern with adults as a way to inform their own political beliefs, as these political beliefs are often “derived from parents, teachers, the mass media, and observations in their own neighborhood,” as Gillman and Sofer (1978, p. 82) noted in their research forty years ago. Teachers and family members were the most commonly cited people to whom young people look for information about current events and politics. Participants often mentioned family discussions about politics at the dinner table, in which the adults at the table would debate which candidate to vote for in the forthcoming election. Selah, aged 15, learns from others: “it’s the people around me that have really affected that aspect about me, because usually, when they talk about it I have no idea what they would be talking about. They do educate me, and I think that’s helpful.” In particular, Selah prefers to talk to her teachers, because “they know more. They are more wiser [sic].” Young people lack confidence in their knowledge about how politics works (Henn & Foard, 2012), and the sentiment of being “just a kid” and not knowing much about politics appeared to be a common explanation among participants for why they most often prefer to talk to adults about politics. Previous research demonstrates that young people rely on support and advice from adults (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickhur, & Rainie, 2011).

While Selah says that she learns most from her wise teachers, young people primarily talk to their parents to develop their own views. Nora, aged 15, shares that her mother and aunt discuss the 2016 presidential election, and she will “pay attention to what they’re saying” to learn from them. Likewise, Sachi, aged 17, talks about politics with his parents because “they know more” than his peers, and Martin, aged 15, says that he enjoys learning from his mother, who is “wise.” Interestingly, many participants, like Selah, Nora, and Martin, tend to listen to adults, rather than sharing their own voices and engaging in dialogue. Young people perceive the wisdom of their elders because these adults have already had the experience of voting and participating in elections before. Extensive research demonstrates this link between family and political identity (Hess & Torney-Purta, 2005). Imani, aged 14, talks to her mother about politics, and

voting in particular. Her mother sometimes does not vote because she does not agree with everything that the candidates stand for. Imani's mother demonstrates that not voting is a way to exercise political voice as well, especially if it is difficult to agree with any candidate. Young people learn about voting as a way to participate, but they can also decide to not vote. Imani's mother has shared many of her beliefs with Imani, especially related to being a Democrat, and her opinions on Donald Trump. Imani's mother notes that Donald Trump says "a lot of ridiculous things" that would "apply" to her family, particularly because Donald Trump campaigned on anti-immigrant rhetoric (Osler & Starkey, 2018). Imani worried that should Donald Trump

become president, and make sure all the immigrants go back from where the hell they came from, then that would apply to my family, because my family ... most of them are immigrants. They came from Cape Verde. So that means we'd all go back to Cape Verde. And, say, if my family was Muslim, and... he has a lot of things to say about Muslims, but say if my family was Muslim, that would really like... upset my family and me.

Imani brings current events close to home: she understands how politics can affect specific groups of people, including her own family.

The immigration debate that continues to pervade public discourse has also influenced the political dialogue occurring between young people and their parents. Kenai, aged 14, says that his "view on immigration was originally that... it's okay for people to be free to immigrate. And my mom is really strong in that belief." Kenai explains that he and his mother's beliefs are "partly religious, because my mom thinks that everyone should be kind to each other. Honestly, the only thing I really see on media about immigration is frustration from people about it, especially Donald Trump." Kenai thinks critically about his own beliefs, acknowledges that they have been shaped by his family values, and connects these beliefs to the current headlines around immigration reform in the United States. Evidently, parents inform the values and belief systems of young people, but young people are not always able to separate their beliefs from their parents'. Jaden, also aged 14, reflected on his own beliefs and shares, "I just kinda go with what my parents say. If they say, 'Vote for Hillary,' I vote for Hillary." Jaden exemplifies that not all young people have taken ownership of their beliefs, and illustrates a potential negative effect that emerges from young people looking to adults as they form their own

political beliefs. If young people only listen to their parents, then they are in danger of not being exposed to different ideas, or thinking critically about their own.

### **6.1.3 Choosing a Political Party Affiliation**

Political identity is informed by how young people understand what it means to be a citizen and what it means to be civically engaged. Almond and Verba identified (1963) five key influences, including family, peers, voluntary organizations, schools, and the mass media, which serve as social contexts and sources of information and opportunities for political learning and behavior (McLeod & Shah, 2009). People's associations within their neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, clubs, and associations define the political preferences to which the individual is exposed (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). Of these, family and school experience has been found to have a strong influence over young people's civic identity development (Dassonneville, Quintelier, Hooghe, & Claes, 2012; Kisby & Sloam, 2014; Print, 2007; Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011). When young people have an understanding of what their beliefs are and how they align with the beliefs of others, they may choose to affiliate with a political party. Young people "test out" their political opinions on their families (Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007, p. 29), and, often, family members' political identity or affiliation would come to light through conversations with their families, as described in Section 6.1.2. The effect of family communication is indirect, "mediated through its influence on the extent to which adolescents engage in various forms of expression and exchange outside the family, in classrooms, and within social networks" (Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009, p. 113).

Membership in a political party is a public presentation of one's belief system, and an expression of voice. When it comes to choosing a political party affiliation, young people may or may not have a political identity wherein they identify with a particular political party or candidate. Few participants assert that they are members of a political party, but in many cases, political party affiliation stems from the family and community in which the young people have grown up. Some young people deliberately do not wish to affiliate themselves with a political party because they disagree with the two-party system in the United States, or they do not trust the political parties, or they feel the current status of the political parties are not aligned well-enough with their

beliefs. This section will illustrate how young people are thinking about their own political party affiliation – or lack thereof.

Sachi, aged 17, sounded proud to reveal, “I’m a Democrat,” and subsequently excited upon sharing his opinion about Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders as “too radical,” and his support of Hillary Clinton as the candidate for president.

Correspondingly, Joseph, aged 16, relates his own beliefs and values to Bernie Sanders, who he feels would represent his own values in political office. Joseph finds it important that Bernie Sanders “said once that he would try to make college more available for people.” Joseph, who is not eligible to vote in the 2016 presidential election, nevertheless has preferences for a presidential candidate based on his own desires as a low-income student pursuing higher education.

While young people relate their political preferences to their own beliefs and circumstances, others recognize the influence of their community on their own beliefs and political party affiliation. Addie, aged 14, describes that her political community is homogenous, leaning heavily toward the Democratic platform. Addie and her friends are “always just trashing on Donald Trump mostly.” Addie and her peers have witnessed Donald Trump’s use of Twitter as a platform for his voice, and his insults to other candidates. The ways in which Addie has learned about Donald Trump and other candidates in the election have been digitally mediated, particularly on Twitter.

Addie shares that “everyone I’m friends with is Democrats, so it’s not like I’m stepping on anyone’s toes” and that her city “is like the most Democratic city ever.” Addie shares that the political beliefs of those around her shape her beliefs. She has decided not to discuss politics with her best friend, a Republican, in order to preserve their friendship, a dilemma that will be discussed in Section 6.2.1. Sean, aged 15, who grew up in the same city as Addie, says that he is a “Democrat, probably. I’ve shaped my beliefs to align... I mean, everyone I know is a Democrat. And like everyone I grew up with.” Sean says that he shaped his views to match the views of others in his community, and that the politically homogenous community shaped his views, illustrating a reciprocal effect. It is not surprising that Addie and Sean noticed this political composition in their city, as the geographic region of data collection, an urban area on the east coast of the

United States, is known to be Democratic, as are other cities and pockets along the coast.

Tanesha, aged 16, expressed her concerns about what each of the two political parties in the United States represent, and therefore does not see herself in alignment “with any political party.” Tanesha shares that when she is “of the age” to vote, she will not become a member of a political party. Tanesha has learned through her advanced United States history course that “sometimes parties’ views like, slowly gradually change. Like, for ... I take AP US History, and I’ve seen that Democrats and Republicans, their viewpoints have somewhat kinda switched over the years back and forth.” With this understanding in mind, Tanesha shares that most recently, she aligns “more with the Democrats than Republicans. And no I’m not the Democratic Party, but I do agree with their viewpoints at the moment, in this current stage.” Tanesha sees herself on the political spectrum closer to the Democrats than the Republicans because “Democrats are more involved government that’s there to help. And personally, I think I need a government that’s willing to help because some things won’t be ...well, ‘cause there are a lot of corrupt [people] about to give in within the Republican government.” Tanesha comes from a community that benefits from social welfare programs, which is exemplified by her belief that it is important for the government to “help” people.

Martin, aged 15, holds similar sentiments as Tanesha, and demonstrates understanding of how political parties developed in the United States. Martin chooses to identify as an Independent, because “you learn what history has to say about what originally these parties stood for.” Martin disapproves of the Democrats having been “pro-slavery at one time, and the Ku Klux Klan was sent by Republicans against the Democratic Party. And like, nowadays it’s kinda switched.”

Tanesha wrestles with where her beliefs fall on the political spectrum, and acknowledges that her beliefs align closer to Democrats, but several participants deliberately choose to not affiliate with a political party. Damon, aged 14, prefers to “separate myself from them and like, think about the possibilities, just be by myself.” Damon also chooses not to identify himself with anyone on the current political stage because these figures “are only based on one thing.” Damon suggests that the politicians he is aware of are focused on single issues, and do not appeal to his own interests. Equally, Robert, aged 16, says that he does not wish to affiliate with a political party

because he is “not that political yet” and does not see himself voting for a “Democrat or a Republican each time. I’d rather like, switch it up. Like if one side has somebody who I see that can make a change, or something like that, I would vote for them instead of just voting for a Democrat every single time.” Robert wishes to vote for the candidate who “presents themselves” the best, with interests and ideas that appeal to Robert, rather than always voting on party lines.

Most participants shared a view about their political party affiliations, and it is important to note that there were several who deliberately chose not to affiliate. Young people deliberately decide to not affiliate with political parties because they feel a personal disagreement with the issues and values that the parties each represent. These young people choose to express their voice by disagreeing with how the political parties evolve to change positions on certain issues over time, or not wishing to label their identity. Moreover, use of social media by public figures to promote their agenda and insult others has even turned off some young people, like Tanesha, from choosing to identify with a political party. A trend in the data demonstrated that for the few participants who have not had much thought about affiliating with a political party and were unsure of how to discuss their beliefs, they also tend to pay less attention to current events.

### ***Political Identity Development: The Case of Elsie***

Elsie, aged 17, is an outspoken critical thinker who is very interested in politics. Elsie developed her political ideas and beliefs throughout her upbringing by following current events, participating in the Junior State of America, and discussing political and social issues with her parents. Elsie provides a strong vignette to demonstrate the evolution of political identity throughout adolescence, as her first political memory is from when she was nine or ten years old, when she noticed an Obama pin on her friend’s backpack. Elsie became truly interested in politics at age 11 or 12. At that point, Elsie recalls being a “Libertarian Republican because that was what my father was. I was one of the only conservatives in my grade.” Today, Elsie describes her political views as “left-wing Libertarian” because she believes that “government involvement leads to it being bureaucratic and poorly-run.” Elsie believes that gay marriage and abortion are two examples of issues that the government should not “be a part of.” For Elsie, “the

government shouldn't say who you can and cannot marry beyond like, protecting children from being sold into sex slavery. There's no reason for the government to be like, 'Well, you can't marry someone who's like this.' And you know, abortion should be a decision between a woman and her doctor, and the government shouldn't be involved." Key to the Libertarian philosophy is individual liberty, and Elsie's beliefs align with this attitude.

Elsie used to be more "conservative," like her father. She agreed with everything he said, but in high school, she started "arguing with people" and began learning more about her own beliefs through such conversations. Elsie enjoys finding "grey areas to argue about" and genuinely wants to understand different viewpoints. She complained that when others ask her about her views, they do not share theirs. Elsie blames this on the fact that she goes "to a liberal school that doesn't really train people to have discourse." So, Elsie seizes any and every opportunity to "have discourse" with others and share her voice.

For someone who appreciates learning from the arguments with those with differing opinions, it frustrates Elsie that she is mostly surrounded by people who agree with her. For example, no one in Elsie's family is pro-life, so her pro-choice stance on abortion is not challenged. Elsie reflected on this issue and others. Certain events or issues "anger" her, and she feels "this is an issue in our community and we should do something about it. But I find a lot of the time that there aren't things I can do about the problem." Elsie specified that she is concerned about Islamophobia in her synagogue youth group: "It's one of those things when I feel like I should say something, but I don't know how to say something." Elsie does not seem afraid to speak her mind, yet feels stifled or tongue-tied when compelled to stand up to prejudice and injustice. Elsie's sense of efficacy is tied to her feeling that she could speak up – but she does not know what to say to make a difference.

Elsie acknowledged that environment forms individuals and identities, and "education informs a lot of your prejudices." It upsets her when she discovers that people from her community – from a similar educational and socioeconomic background – have "all these prejudices." She seems more understanding of prejudice from a community unlike her own. For Elsie, she is "a little less fazed by absurd things" that strangers might say

in her interactions with them on social media. However, “if it’s someone I know, and if it’s someone, for example, I go to school with, and so they have the same educational background as me, I’m a little more, like... ‘Okay, what’s your problem? Because you should know better.’” For example, “you could be arguing online with someone who’s stopped going to school in the eighth grade, is from the deep, deep South, and of course, you know, they have white supremacist views, they joined the KKK when they were 17 because that was their community.” Elsie concedes, “That’s what kept them going. So it’s like, well, they need to get educated, but they’re a lot less likely to listen to you, and ... you know, it’s just a very different experience where, like... if it’s someone I know, it’s someone who should know better.” Elsie preaches that she wants to hear diverse perspectives, but the beliefs she expresses suggest she also may hold prejudices against talking to others with “radical” beliefs. The following section will describe how young people are expressing their political beliefs and learning from their peers.

## **6.2 Sharing One’s Voice in Contemporary Society**

In shaping their views of the political world, and their own political beliefs, young people in this study often discuss political and social issues with trusted adults in their lives, and with their peers. Previous research indicates that young people’s understanding of political issues develops through their social ties and discussions with others (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014), which complement the influences of mass media discussed in Section 6.1 (McLeod & Shah, 2009). These conversations within one’s closer social network enable people to “interpret media messages, and construct meaning about public affairs” (McLeod & Shah, 2009, p. 5). The degree to which young people feel their voices are heard depends on how others perceive them and their beliefs, and their personal investment in the issue being discussed. Influential factors include friends, the tensions within the formation of political beliefs, and their relationship with adults, which influences self-efficacy. This section will explore the dynamics that affect whether young people share their voices in contemporary society.

### **6.2.1 Maintaining Friendships**

Key to exercising political voice is discussing issues of public concern with people in one’s community. There are several factors that influence whether or not a young person chooses to discuss these issues with friends or peers. While there was an

assumption that adolescence is a period of exploring ideologies and having thought-provoking political discussions with friends, this is not always the case (Gillman & Sofer, 1978), particularly because adolescents care very much about getting on with their peers. Conflict – or the perception of its existence – diminishes young people’s engagement (Hodgin, 2016). For those young people who choose not to discuss issues of public concern, some have a fear of losing friendships over a difference in opinion or values, and therefore hesitate to disclose their political opinions.

Kaitlyn, aged 16, describes the tension she feels with a friend from whom her political beliefs differ: “I know [discussing politics] is just starting an argument...on her Facebook she’ll Share all these things I disagree with, so I know if I say something, it’s just going to cause issues. And I would rather... I care more about our friendship than about our political views, so I just keep it to myself.” Kaitlyn believes it is especially important to “keep politics out of” social media, especially “because everyone has different beliefs. I don’t voice it with my friends too often because I know... they have the right to believe what they want, and it would just cause arguments. But I’ll talk about it with my family, definitely.” Kaitlyn felt “acute disappointment” when she learned that her close friend and her friend’s family supported Donald Trump. Addie, aged 14, notes that her community is politically homogenous, and she shares that her “best friend, she’s a Republican” and when they talk they do not “go into depth about politics because we have different views of what’s happening. So I wouldn’t say anything really controversial.” In fact, often, Addie will go so far as to “ask someone are they Democrat or Republican, before I want to talk about the elections and stuff.” Kaitlyn and Addie note that people have different beliefs and affiliate with different political parties – but does not acknowledge the possible benefits of interacting with others whose beliefs are different from hers. While young people are at a critical stage in development to process information from the media, formulate and express their own ideas and opinions, and understand others’ points of view (McLeod, 2000), it seems that sometimes friendship is more important than understanding what that friend’s beliefs are. Young people are hesitant to share their views for fear of disagreement or being taken seriously (Hodgin, 2016).

Furthermore, Jillian, aged 15, notes that she sometimes discusses news and current events with her friends, and the conversations go like this: ““Do you agree on what they

said last night? Do you like it? Do you dislike it? What do you like about them?’ and then most of the time, we’ll agree ... on what they’re talking about.” Jillian shares that sometimes, when she and her friends disagree, they decide to “stop talking about politics, because once you disagree, you can ruin friendships.” Jillian referred to her mother’s advice to “never talk about politics.” It is troubling that Jillian was advised in this way, as discourse with others can be beneficial for perspective taking and developing one’s own views (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Kaitlyn, Addie, Jillian, and other young people are more drawn to others with similar interests and attitudes, as adolescents primarily view other people based on interests and attitudes (Coleman, 2011). In contrast, Maisie, aged 14, comments, “I think that everybody does have their own, like, political opinion and I don’t think ... I’m even knowledgeable enough to tell somebody that, A) they’re wrong, or B) um... that I am right.” When Maisie talks to others about politics, she states her “opinion but not in a threatening way.” Maisie appears to have risen above the desire to please friends, and has come to an understanding of what it means to have a respectful discussion with someone who holds different political views.

While Kaitlyn and Jillian feared losing friendships, other participants felt uncomfortable admitting to their friends that they pay attention to current events and have an opinion about politics. Imani, aged 14, thinks her peers would frown upon her if she asked them if they watched the presidential debates: “If I was like, ‘Guys, did you watch the debate?’ they’d be like, ‘Why the hell are you watching debates?’” Imani fears judgment from her peers, which echoes the judgment and expectations of society that young people do not pay attention to current events and voice their opinions. Similar, Jackie, aged 16, does not Share news articles through social media because, “It’s kind of cliché but I don’t want to re-post or re-Tweet a news story because people will be like ‘why is she doing that.’ Other people see it as weird, so I don’t really want to do that.” Kevin, aged 15, would not talk to his friends about politics, because he perceives his friends as “very immature” and not capable of having productive discussions about political and social issues. Kevin indicates, “most of my friends just get very mad when somebody talks about a certain person. Like, if I start talking about Donald Trump, my friends will start screaming, ‘Donald Trump sucks!’ It’s... just bad.”

Kevin alludes to his own friends not being “mature” enough to have discussions about political and social issues, which was a common concern among participants. Young people choose not to share their political views because they fear judgment because their ideas and beliefs are not yet fully formed, and because society – and their peers – expect them to not voice their beliefs. For example, Ava, aged 16, describes the tension of not knowing what to believe: “It’s hard to form an opinion, and at my age... I don’t know which one’s right, which one’s wrong... because there are so many opinions.” Ava feels like she “should do more research and form my own, not based on what other people’s opinions are, because you don’t know if it’s right or wrong.” Ava explains, “that’s why on social media, when the person was Tweeting it, I don’t know, like... what their opinion was, so I don’t wanna re-Tweet what’s wrong, or they just like put a twist to a bad thing and just made it sound better.”

Tanesha, aged 16, talks to friends – but not family, because her family is “never home” – who agree with her political opinions, and sometimes these conversations happen via Snapchat. Throughout the primary election season, which occurred over the course of our interviews, Tanesha explained to me that Snapchat had filters to show election results. While Tanesha and Zelda, aged 14, have digitally mediated discussions with their friends about politics, Jackie, aged 16, prefers to have discussions in person, because it is easier to interpret the other person’s tone: “It’s harder to get your tone across through text message. So if we’re hanging out, and if we see on social media if there’s an article or something or a headline that says something about Donald Trump for example, we’ll talk about what we think.” Misinterpretation is more likely to occur when there is not a face-to-face interaction because the context in which one reads a text on social media may be different from the context in which the author made the post (Jones, 2012). Young people who have prior experience of text misinterpretation shy away from having these discussions through text or social media. Elsie, aged 17, also identifies the issue of misinterpretation within digitally mediated discussions, and therefore prefers to have conversations about current events in person. On the Internet, “it’s hard to tell which people are serious, and which people are trolling. And um... I’ve found when it’s with people you can sort of, understand more so where they’re coming from.” Elsie tries to “stay out of stuff on Tumblr, because like, no matter what you say, you’re probably wrong.” More often than not, Elsie says, “Online, I’m always worried about what I say is going to get misinterpreted.”

In contrast to Tanesha, Bibiana would find it more interesting to talk to people who had views differing from her own. Bibiana does not always talk to her friends about current events, because she feels like her peers are “kind of in the same boat” as she is, and do not offer “a different view on like, the surroundings.” Bibiana feels that talking to “someone who’s actively involved or who actually votes or likes to be involved in politics” is more useful, because they “would be actively involved in trying to get more information.” Bibiana describes herself and her friends as those who “observe” things that are going on in the world around them, like “riots,” through social media. Bibiana is more interested in talking to adults, who have more experience in the political world, than her peers. Like Bibiana, Elsie, aged 17, genuinely wants to learn about “the other side” and “understand where they’re coming from.” Bibiana and Elsie allude to the homogenous political communities that Addie and Sean mentioned in Section 6.1.3, and their experience highlights how they have difficulty shaping their opinions without the opportunity to talk to people of different perspectives. The young people in this study are most concerned with people and issues that are of immediate concern to them, their families, friends, and communities. Perhaps this is why young people like Bibiana and Elsie have not taken to social media to interact with others outside of their homogenous political communities – young people are more interested in the issues and people that are closer to home.

Ava previously alluded to social media as a database of opinions – but she does not know which is “right” or “wrong.” It appears that Ava, like many of her peers, wants to avoid making a mistake by re-Tweeting something “wrong,” and giving others the impression that she holds a certain belief, when in reality she is trying out different beliefs and identities, and discovering what her values are. This may be a function of the tension between one’s private self versus their public self that Goffman (1959; 1978) and Schlenker (1986; 2012) described as discussed in Chapter Four: young people are not sure of what to disclose, or how to disclose it, or at what point in the thought process to disclose it. On some social media platforms, like Tumblr, young people can create or Follow blogs to explore their political beliefs without anyone knowing their name – there is less ownership of these fluid beliefs. Tumblr allows for this fluid identity experimentation and discovery, whereas some more rigid platforms, like Facebook, do not. Facebook requires a name or identifying feature for the profile page, thereby

automatically attaching anything that is Shared to that person's name. Young people may be hesitant to disclose their political beliefs on their Facebook profiles for this reason, as everyone in their Facebook social circle would then know their beliefs. Elsie is an important example: she prefers "to keep political stuff off my Facebook. I like to be somewhat in control of who knows what about me and my views."

Young people are in a limbo state: they are grappling with understanding their own political views, yet are reluctant to discuss them with friends for fear of losing friendships. This hesitance leads to how young people display their beliefs on social media pages, often keeping their views private, or within their family circles. Young people most often trust adults, but face issues of efficacy in that their voices are not always heard by the adults they look to as role models in their lives, as the next section will demonstrate.

### **6.2.2 Young People's Perceptions of Being Heard**

While it is evident that many young people approach political conversations with their peers in trepidation, some young people believe that sharing their viewpoints is an essential factor of citizenship and belonging. Martin, aged 15, says that one can be a citizen by "having a say in things, voicing your opinion. You can have freedom of speech, but a time when I felt like a citizen... voicing [my] opinions." Yet, as this section will reveal, the dilemma is that many young people voice their opinions, but do not feel they are *heard*. This section will illustrate the experiences of nine participants who have felt that adults do not hear them when they voice their opinions.

Maisie, aged 14, described the desire for young people to be heard and taken seriously by adults. Maisie asserted that there are other ways to be civically engaged beyond voting, such as the citywide youth council in Maisie's city. Unfortunately, Maisie has been unsuccessful with the issues she has tried to change and for which she has tried to make her voice heard, resulting in a low sense of efficacy, and skepticism about adults who truly listen to the youth council, and whether her voice will ever be heard. Maisie notes, "the younger you are, the less respect you get for your opinions and engagement. There's always something keeping you from being respected, but I'll always have to be as confident as possible... like... 'I respect myself and I respect my opinion, and I'm

saying it in a way that's confident, so you should respect it, too.” Maisie is unsure of whether there will be a time in her life that she feels that her voice is heard: “I don't think it's a specific age, I don't think the day I turn eighteen it's gonna be like, ‘You're an adult now.’ I think even then, there will be other reasons to look down on me.” This feeling of being looked down upon can be frustrating for anyone, of any age. Maisie continues, “Some people even still consider eighteen like, ‘just a kid,’ even when you're in your twenties or thirties, there's always an age difference, or like, something that's keeping you from being respected.” For Maisie, this idea of always being younger sets a difficult challenge that seems impossible to overcome.

Sean, aged 15, expounds upon the issue of feeling like one's voice is not heard, especially when one is too young to vote: “I think there are some opportunities for people who can't vote to be able to let what they think be heard. And that's ... partially enabled by technology, because people don't always know how old you are on technology.” Sean highlights that technology can be a way around the age barrier in making one's voice heard, an idea that will be further addressed in section 6.3. Sean also expresses that voting is a possible way to make one's voice heard, but does not always have its desired effect: “Once you're able to vote, that does enable you to vote for a candidate, but voting for a candidate ... doesn't always mean that your specific voice is being heard.” Sean details the complexity of the right to vote: a vote represents a medium through which one can express an opinion, but the person or issue one votes for may not win. Sean also speaks about the student council at his school, how it is meant to give students an opportunity to enact change in their school. However, he is frustrated that the student council “literally don't have much power. Like, we don't have any like, authority. I mean like... we like, take votes but ... on the school policy we have no like, actual say in ... its administration's job, basically.... It's their job to run the school.” This idea of authority is complex, and perceived by other participants in this study, such as Habibah, aged 16. She believes that adults “in authority, their voice gets heard more than the young people, because if they have authority, then they have the power, so their voice weighs more than just a regular high school student that doesn't really have that much power or authority.” Habibah feels that if her voice were to be heard, she would need to be endorsed by someone “powerful,” like the President – someone who would entice others to listen to her.

As Maisie, Sean, and Habibah expressed their frustration that their voices remain unheard at school or by the city government, another arena in which young people's voices are not always heard is the home. Martin, aged 15, likes to talk with his mother about current events because she is "wise," but acknowledges that in those conversations, "it's more... um... her talking, rather than me talking." Similarly, Jaden, aged 14, has parents who "don't ask" what he is thinking. And, in the case of Kenai, aged 14, his family boldly excludes him from these discussions. Kenai explains that his family will "want to know my opinion and if they don't like my opinion it'd be really obvious that they don't like it. And if they do like it, they just say 'stay out of that until you're like, eighteen or something like that, or you can vote.'" In the past, parental attitudes toward politics have been, "not in front of the children!" (Gillman & Sofer, 1978, p. 82). Some parents, like Kenai's, have told young people to stay out of political conversations, keeping young people from the space and time to grapple with their beliefs, and reconcile them with beliefs of people they know and trust. But, when families and trusted adults shut down the voices of young people in the home, it becomes more difficult for young people to feel confident that their voices will be heard elsewhere (Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009).

Kenai revealed his family dynamic, which plays a part in his low sense of efficacy. He is interested in politics but, as described above, he does not often have the opportunity to discuss the views that he is forming, despite his desires to have these discussions. He wants "to be involved in the conversation, because I think ... from like, the younger side to the older side, it's good to give them my opinion of things. And just to get my voice across." When his family will not talk to him about politics, Kenai turns to Google to research the topics he wants to discuss. Kenai is excited to vote in the future, because he will finally have the freedom to express his beliefs. Interestingly, he thinks his family "would allow me to vote, but they would... try to sway my opinion to theirs ... before they would let me. That's one of the things that can happen. Or they would... just let me vote and not be too strict on it. Now that I'm of age, I should have the right, or like, the responsibility to do so myself." When young people do have the opportunity to talk with parents and other adults, some young people, like Robert, aged 16, view the adults as having an "advantage" in the conversation. This "advantage" comes from being older and perceivably more knowledgeable about the issues. When Robert talks about current events with his father, "he can say things that I don't understand, and I'll just like, sit

back. I'm like, 'Okay, you got it.'" Robert defers to his father for knowledge about current events.

The findings presented here raise an important issue: if young people are discouraged from talking to adults they trust about their opinions as they formulate them because they are seen by adults as "too young" to have opinions, how can young people shape their ideas and be prepared to work with others in the future to resolve complex issues? Some young people turn to technology, as Sean alluded, and as Kenai does with his Google research. However, young people are often so disempowered that they do not develop or share their views by posting their own views on social media. Dahlgren and Olsson (2007) note that one must feel empowered so that civic engagement must be meaningful. However, what has become clear through findings presented here is that young people often feel too disempowered to become civically engaged, even through digital means like social media.

### **6.2.3 Using Everyday Tools for Political Voice: Young People in the Black Lives Matter Movement**

It is important to address the factors that influence why young people feel limited in their ability to express themselves as citizens. This problem might be partly due to the fact that they are perceived as too young. Young people seem to be stuck in this perception of being "too young" for years, as the definition of what it means to be a young person becomes blurred. Galland (2007) notes that this is a result of the individualized status of reaching "adulthood," as people prolong their years in formal education, delay marriage, and hold short-term employment at the start of their working lives, all factors in the normative dimension of age (James, 2014). Changing societal norms are keeping young people in this "youth" status for much longer, which has the potential to greatly harm their sense of self-efficacy: because if "adulthood" means achieving certain milestones in education, relationships, and employment that society uses to mark adulthood, young people will achieve this status, and the respect it demands, at different ages. Voting age in the United States is 18 – legal adulthood – but if young people are perceived as adults much later, young people might not feel fully heard by other adults when they do reach voting age.

Among participants, there was a strong feeling of restriction and a sense that teenagers are not full citizens, which stems from the fact that the young people in this study are not yet 18 and eligible to vote. Some young people feel that teenagers are not full citizens because they genuinely believed that a citizen is someone who is able to vote, someone who is an adult as defined by the law at age 18, and someone who has authority over others. This perception of power structures, particularly in schools, as participants allude to adults having control of school, comes into play by yielding a lower sense of self-efficacy.

Kenai believes “I can’t really do much, politically. Like I can’t really have big of an impact on what’s going on.” After a moment, he mentioned the ballot initiative in his school, as discussed in Chapter Five, and shared that it was important to him to “participate” in “stuff like that.” Robert agrees that it is important for young people to “participate” as Kenai says, because “for young people, like my age to be like, pushing... putting themselves out there to like, show that we actually care about what’s going on, it means a lot. So like, I guess that can start some type of change.” Because people assume that young people will not be engaged, actually having young people engaged seems to make a big impact. Jillian says “even some adults, they’re like ‘They’re just a kid, they can’t do anything, they’re just a kid.’ But kids actually have a lot of impact. Because they know what they want to grow up in. Sometimes being a citizen means that you’re too young, can’t do it ... the adults are the only ones who can do that.” Kenai and Jillian put out a call for young people to become engaged and share their voices in order to make a change, but still feel frustrated that their impact as citizens is relatively low.

Indeed, young people in this study expressed their frustration with feeling unheard, and illustrated examples of how they can attempt to make their voices heard without having to contend with adults. As Sean expressed, one can use technology and social media because in many cases, one does not need to reveal age online. Buckingham (2013) notes, “the Internet provides *some* [emphasis original] children with the opportunity for their voices to be heard, in ways that transcend hitherto insurmountable barriers of geographical distance or social difference” (p. 81). Scholars also note that the Internet provides a “route to pursue already existing civic interests” (Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007, p. 26). A lower sense of self-efficacy and a feeling of teenagers are not

full citizens has been overcome by some young people using social media as a platform to make their voices heard. Technology is “transforming and connecting [young people] to one another, providing them with a new sense of political self” (Katz, 1997, p. 173). This has become especially true as young people become involved in the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States.

Participants who became involved in the Black Lives Matter movement spoke about their racial identity during our interviews. When racial identity was revealed, participants delved into the personal nature of race, and how this racial identity manifests itself in their daily lives. Tanesha, aged 16, and a black female, demonstrated her racial identity when she says she feels a connection to former President Barack Obama because he “was the first African-American President, and ... I’m really big on social issues, especially when it comes to gender discrimination and race discrimination.” Tanesha herself has “become involved in those movements.” Bandura (2008) notes that when people find role models that are similar to them, they have an increase in efficacy when they see that other person doing something they want to do. Tanesha has done just this after noting the causes championed by Barack Obama. Tanesha shares that her personal identity affects the issues that she cares about and wants to become involved in. Related to this issue of racial discrimination is the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement.

The Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of the man on neighborhood watch who fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, a young black man. The movement is “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise” (Black Lives Matter, 2018). Black Lives Matter has developed through the leadership of its organizers Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, and in the five years since the movement began, there have been countless incidents that have resulted in deaths, and in collective action. In 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri (BBC News, 2014), a further incident of racial profiling and brutality against blacks, which subsequently led to violence and unrest in Ferguson (BBC News, 2015), which participant Martin discussed in his interviews. The movement has grown through the use of social media, and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which seeks to amplify how anti-Black racism pervades the United

States (Black Lives Matter, 2018). Young people have not only caught on to this movement, but they have become involved with it through social media.

Addie, aged 14, reflected on her level of engagement and activism following the news of excessive force against blacks in the United States. In her former school, “a public school, there were only five black kids out of like three hundred kids.” Addie was one of these five students. She notes, “There is a lot of racism going on” in the United States, “especially with Donald Trump.” Addie’s efficacy to resolve this social issue has wavered:

Well, at times, with the shootings and everything, I don’t really get inspired to do something... Actually, no. When I had Instagram, I would always post stuff about that. Because I know how I have a lot of Followers so I thought I should say something ... to speak my mind, you know. And I would do that. That was the most I’d do, because ... I’m only a kid, I really can’t do as much stuff, I don’t think.

Addie’s sense that her age – being “only a kid” – precluded her from taking action led her to take a step toward making her voice heard on social media. Addie also sees her posts as a way for others to learn about other opinions. Addie wants others to know “what’s happening. And also, if someone heard this story but from a different point of view, and from my point of view of how it’s wrong, that could help and making them change their... idea of what was happening.” While Addie does not know how many people read or see her posts – what Levine (2008) has established as the “audience problem” – she is confident that at least some of her social network will be exposed to her views, and will learn from them. Most commonly, friends are the intended audience for such posts, but not all young people realize that their friends may not always see – or pay attention to – what they post (boyd, 2009).

As indicated in Section 6.1, information about current events is easily accessed through social media. Nadia, aged 16, recognizes the ease with which people can access information through social media, and therefore claims that social media is the best way to get the word out about any issue because “people are always on their phones. So it’s like, if you constantly keep seeing it, it’s like, ‘oh, maybe I should check it out.’” While Addie uses the Internet to share her views on Black Lives Matter, Veronica, aged 15, consumes news about the movement through social media. Veronica says that social

media informed her about what was happening to black teens, and the Black Lives Matter movement: “I wouldn’t have known about Sandra Bland if it weren’t for Facebook. Same thing about Trayvon Martin. If it wasn’t for Facebook I wouldn’t have known about it unless someone else had come up to me and told me, because I’m not really a big TV person, I don’t really watch anything. That’s how I find my information as well.”

Social media has become a platform for activists of all ages to spread awareness about the police brutality affecting black communities throughout the United States, and to share voices and suggest civic actions. Addie took to Instagram to share her own beliefs about and reactions to the current events. Young people across the United States learned about marches and vigils through social media, including Martin, who discussed this in Chapter Four. Veronica recognized how important social media has been for the movement – perhaps most importantly, Addie recognized social media as a way for young people to be heard.

### **6.3 Engaging in the Political World in Contemporary Society**

Young people’s sense of their position in society as “too young” to participate contributes to their understanding of how they might engage in the political world. While young people feel that society does not expect them to pay attention to current events, they follow current events anyway, and pursue discussions with trusted adults to learn more and develop and articulate their own views. Young people may not be rebelling against society on purpose, but they are certainly demonstrating that their generation is far more capable and interested than adults surmise, as a growing body of research suggests (Pontes, Henn, & Griffiths, 2018).

Young people interact with and contribute to the world around them by following current events through social media, which aids young people in developing their political beliefs. Young people are also becoming aware of current events and shaping their beliefs by interacting with others, primarily with people who are close to them, such as teachers and parents, but shy away from discussing these issues with their peers. Young people prefer to discuss these issues in person, rather than online, because of the fear of being misinterpreted through text message or another online platform. Young

people feel this way primarily because they prioritize preserving their friendships, and seek to avoid confrontation with friends who may have differing political views. In the region where data was collected, most participants felt their political communities were homogenous, and therefore these young people did not have access to a diversity of perspectives. Notably, the participants who were recruited from a Catholic high school – which draws students from suburban and rural towns surrounding the urban area of fieldwork – voiced more concerns about losing friendships as a result of political disagreement. It seems that the political diversity within this high school is greater than that experienced by the participants who attend public schools in the liberal, urban setting. While previous studies have demonstrated that people can expand their social circles by meeting people online who they might not have met face-to-face (Holloway & Valentine, 2003), the young people in this study did not seek out online interaction to explore political issues with others they did not know. While young people did wish to have political conversations, it is clear that they prefer to keep these conversations within the family.

How young people understand citizenship impacts their sense of self-efficacy (Dias & Menezes, 2014). The findings presented in this chapter indicate that key to active citizenship is exercising one's voice. Maisie, aged 14, shares frustration that young people are completely "overlooked" from the political process because at their age, "Kids aren't expected to know about these things, so they're never taught about them. And then it's an endless loop, because if you don't teach them, then you can't expect them to know it, but if you expect them to know it, then you're never gonna teach them." Maisie wants teachers to explain how taxes work, how voting works, and how to register to vote, "things you're not expected to know, but at the same time, you're expected to figure it out by yourself, unless your family teaches you." Maisie argues that if young people are taught more in school about democratic society and how to participate, then "people would grow up to be more active citizens and more responsible citizens. Then you could have real conversations with kids about their opinions on stuff, and educate them further and like, hear what they have to say. Because I think a lot of kids have good ideas but they just don't really have a voice in anything."

Young people might have the motivation to share their voices, but they do not always have the confidence or support of those around them. Young people are in a catch-22,

and at a crossroads in their development as citizens and social actors. They are not yet adults who are eligible to vote (Finlay, Wray-Lake, & Flanagan, 2010; Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008), but they do have their own beliefs and opinions (Erikson, 1968; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010), and understanding of how they wish to develop and express those beliefs and opinions. If young people are exposed to diversity, they seem to not want to embrace it, but the individuals from the homogenous political community crave diversity. Young people prefer to talk to older adults because they are not confident in their own knowledge about current events and politics; but they talk to these adults even though they feel adults do not listen to them, that their voices are not heard. Young people feel disenfranchised but do not discuss politics with their peers, for fear they will lose friendships. Very few young people are sharing their voices and opinions online or on social media, because many young people do not want to share what they feel are underdeveloped views, and do not want to know whether their friends have different views. Young people who are not listened to at home are unsure of their digital audience: some post their views on social media with the hope that some of their Followers will read them, while others are convinced that no one will read them. Young people have been stifled in their attempts to express their views, but they need the space and understanding from others to develop those views. Findings from this study expose young people's development of civic identity and voice in today's world as a nuanced function of their experiences in contemporary society, and yield a framework of civic identity that will be presented in Chapter Seven.

These tensions and restrictions of voice result in an overwhelmingly low sense of self-efficacy among young people. What has been helpful to some young people is the use of social media as a means of making their voices heard, even when they avoid directly discussing their political beliefs with peers, and feel that adults do not take them and their beliefs seriously. The future implications for young people turning to social media to amplify their voices will be addressed in the next chapter, which highlights the lessons to be learned from the #NeverAgain movement that emerged in February 2018 and the civic skills of those involved, a new framework of civic identity, and recommendations for the future of civic education.

## Chapter Seven | Discussion

# Youth Voice in Contemporary Society

Young people demonstrate ability to analyze issues of public concern when they are provided with time to reflect and debate these issues, and, most importantly, when they “perceive that their opinions are valued and listened to” (Dias & Menezes, 2014, p. 264). The feeling of being unheard has been a longstanding issue and experience for young people, a finding that has been well documented in this study and in previous research (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010). If young people do not feel heard, they might be more inclined to keep their views and thoughts private, presenting a more censored self to the world than they might wish to. Yet, despite this trend in keeping views private, young people have found a motivation to share their voices. In this life stage, young people are growing closer to voting age, and continue to develop their opinions as they interact with news information and others’ opinions about issues of public concern, often in digitally mediated ways. In contemporary society, some young people have taken to the Internet to make their voices heard where they otherwise might not have been heard in the past, but still are not always utilizing digital tools to make their voices heard in the ways we might expect.

Young people who are exposed to diversity of opinions do not seem to want to embrace it by learning from others around them through digital means or otherwise. For those young people who do wish to be exposed to the opinions of others, the majority of this group rarely interacts with others who hold views different from their own.

Contemporary society affords digital means for exposure to diverse opinions, yet young people do not often take advantage of these opportunities, such as a liberal-leaning individual reading right-leaning Tumblr blogs, or Following right-wing leaders on social media platforms. Young people do not often enjoy discussing political topics with their peers for fear they will lose friendships, yet do not embrace the possibility of social media connections to people in their age group from other communities. Instead, young people prefer to learn from older adults in their lives because of these adults' previous experiences with voting or other forms of political participation. At the same time, however, young people are not sharing their own voices with these adults because they are not confident in their own knowledge about current events and politics and they feel that adults do not listen to them. Young people do turn to digital means to learn more about current events, such as following news outlets and politicians on social media, but even when they utilize social media to share their voices, they are uncertain of their audience and whether that audience is indeed listening (boyd, 2009; Levine, 2008). Adults and educators must encourage young people to explore and use these digital spaces, because the more encouragement they receive (i.e., through curriculum and opportunities to do political blogs in the classroom), the more likely they will be to feel their voices *could* be heard (Bandura, 2008). Drawing more young people to create content online to share their views might also draw young people online to read their peers' views, and have a sense that at least their peers may hear them.

The problem of young people feeling unheard is not new, but in contemporary society, young people have taken to social media as a way to both share their voices and learn about ways to participate (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010). In this study, while few voiced their political opinions directly in conversations with friends, family, or through digital means, many young people participated in a walkout from their schools in spring 2016 to protest the budget cuts in their school district, as described in Chapter Five. These young people felt it was important for their voices to be heard – and being seen leaving school, and physically joining the growing numbers at city hall created a great impact on these young people's peers and policymakers. Participation in this walkout galvanized many young people into future action. In this case, young people used social media platforms as a means of learning about and spreading the word about the walkout and organizing each other to participate for the greatest impact.

In a digital age, identity and civic identity must be conceptualized with the understanding that interactions and experiences are digitally mediated at varying degrees for each person. For example, those young people who consumed their news through social media were more likely to bear witness to the immigration debate, which in turn tied into their understanding of citizenship. Moreover, while there is potential for young people to discover volunteer opportunities through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, young people in this study who pursued volunteer work as a part of the *Actively Improving the Community* theme of citizenship did not experience volunteerism in a digitally mediated way, but rather learned about opportunities through their church or school groups.

Social media has informed the ways young people come to understand and think about civic engagement and the issues they care about, and has provided “some children with the opportunity for their voices to be heard” (Buckingham, 2013, p. 81). In the digital era, young people have the opportunity to speak out about current events and issues of public concern in which they have an interest or personal stake. At the time of data collection for this study, young people utilized social media to gain access to information about events outside of their local spheres, which has made them more aware of events happening in other states. At the forefront of young people’s minds were police brutality incidents in Ferguson, Missouri and the subsequent creation of the Black Lives Matter movement. As Chapter Six illustrated, several participants in this study felt evermore connected to the victims of police brutality, and subsequently chose to become more involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. Addie disclosed that as a young black woman, she had experienced racism in her schools, where white students are the majority. Understanding her social network and her large audience, Addie took to her social media accounts to post statements about the young black men who had been killed by police. Without posts like Addie’s, and access to news alerts through social media, young people such as Veronica may not have learned about what was happening to black teens, and may not have become involved in the Black Lives Matter movement.

This chapter returns to the three research questions that framed this study, and explains how the findings from this study, presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, fit in with the existing body of literature on the civic habits and experiences of young people, and

how these links can build a framework for understanding civic identity and inform a reformation of civic education. Section 7.1 will address the ways in which young people present themselves to others in this digital era, and will illustrate how young people present themselves in ways that society expects them to, and struggle to reconcile which aspects of the self to keep private and which to share with the public. Section 7.2 will address the mechanisms through which young people form their civic identity in contemporary society, and will describe the new framework of civic identity that emerged from this study. Section 7.2 will also address the means through which young people engage in the political world, and the factors that contribute to this engagement. Section 7.3 will return to the notions of efficacy and voice, and suggest changes might be made in the education system to foster a greater sense of efficacy among young people.

### **7.1 Youth in Contemporary Society**

The first research question of this study asks, *“In what ways do young people, ages 14 through 17, present themselves to others in contemporary society?”* As Chapter Four illustrated, young people take aspects of their environment (Hasebrink & Paus-Hasebrink, 2007), relationships, and interactions with others to construct their identities (Côté & Levine, 2002; Flanagan, 2013), and present themselves in digitally mediated ways (Gardner & Davis, 2013). Some young people in this study understand themselves as typical teenagers who enjoy spending time with friends and using technology and social media. However, while this idea of the typical teenager can sometimes help to situate young people in a life stage, at other times this label dismisses young people in this age group, and perpetuates the perception that young people are disengaged and apathetic about issues of public concern. This perception further limits young people in sharing their voice – as Maisie lamented in Chapter Six, young people feel disempowered when adults “overlook” them and do not view them as fully contributing members of society. As the participants in this study demonstrate, while they do enjoy the activities and lifestyles of “typical teenagers,” many young people are interested in current events, and want to be engaged, despite feeling overlooked. A recent school shooting in Parkland, Florida brought out a group of empowered young people to begin a national social movement for stricter gun control laws in the United States. There are differences between the participants of this study and the young people in Parkland,

Florida, primarily with regards to their civic education and use of social media to make their voices heard. This section will discuss the findings from this study alongside an emerging social movement that stemmed from a school shooting in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018. This section will illustrate the differences in how the young people of this study are presenting themselves, and how the young people of Parkland are presenting themselves, and the implications of these presentations of the self for civic identity in contemporary society.

Several years have passed since the data collection phase of this study, and issues beyond the school budget cuts, Black Lives Matter movement, and immigration debate have surfaced. One such issue is that of gun reform, which has come to the fore in the wake of mass shootings in the United States. The #NeverAgain movement arose after a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in which 17 people were killed by a shooter with a semi-automatic weapon. From this tragedy emerged grief, strength, and a social movement to eliminate gun violence, especially from schools. The young people of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School took to the local and national news television networks and social media, and began a movement for gun control reform in the United States that has since spread nationwide (Alter, 2018). Survivors of the school shooting started a hashtag on social media, #NeverAgain, to illustrate that what happened at their high school should never happen again. This new movement has emerged through a collective voice of young people who are exhausted by the mass shootings that occur too regularly in the United States, especially in urban underserved communities. Young people in the United States are now gaining momentum on social media and organizing marches across the country, the largest of which was called the March for Our Lives and took place in Washington, D.C. in March 2018. The young people of Parkland know how to harness their collective voice so that the adults in power – politicians and lawmakers – will have no choice but to listen to them. Upon learning of the young people’s actions and appearances on television, Parkland students’ own United States Senator, Marco Rubio, publicly scolded them for being “infected with arrogance” (Lithwick, 2018). Senator Rubio illustrates a wider societal issue: young people’s voices are being dulled and even ridiculed, despite young people’s knowledge, personal experience, and desire to effect change.

What is most notable is that the #NeverAgain movement arose from the students of the high school themselves, who deliberately decided to exclude adults from the movement, except where necessary (i.e., renting a car to drive to march and rally locations). Young people own the movement. One of the movement's leaders, Emma González, did not have a Twitter account at the time of the shooting at her school, but within days she and her colleagues took to social media, and within a week, had more Followers than the NRA<sup>8</sup> (Alter, 2018). This current movement at the national level illustrates what the young people of this study have been doing on their own, but without much traction, like Addie, who posts on Instagram about Black Lives Matter. While the participants in this study seem to be solo actors, other young people – trapped between childhood and adulthood – have created a movement after a specific incident devastated their community.

Returning to Goffman (1959; 1978) and Schlenker's (2012) theories of presentation of the self, the social movement that emerged out of the tragic events in Parkland provides more insight into how young people are presenting themselves to others in the digital era, and how young people can be perceived in contemporary society. In the eyes of adults (the figures who are the leaders and gatekeepers in contemporary society), the young people of Parkland, with their ability to organize effectively and efficiently, and their motivation to make their voices heard and stand up to politicians like Marco Rubio, present themselves as young adults. They have demonstrated their civic knowledge and understanding of how to effectively engage civically, and reveal that they are mature and capable individuals. In contrast, the young people in this study tend to present themselves as young people who are still finding their place in the world, and have difficulty reconciling this life stage of discovery with the opinions that they have already made about the world and desire to share those opinions with others. It is understandable that the young people in this study are discovering who they are, but the Parkland teens have demonstrated that it is advantageous to demonstrate and present maturity and knowledge to others, so that their voices are heard. These presentations of the self illustrate the point of civic identity development that young people experience at this life stage. The young people of this study are still processing and coming to their

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<sup>8</sup> The NRA, as the National Rifle Association is commonly known, is the largest organization that advocates for gun ownership rights, with membership of approximately 4 million people (Steidley & Colen, 2017).

own beliefs, are unsure of which parts of the self to keep private and which to share with others, and how to effectively share their voices and make their voices heard as citizens and community members. Young people are often presenting themselves in ways that society expects – but what young people are actually *doing* without many adults noticing demonstrates that the young people of this study are more engaged than society may have thought, which Section 7.2 will highlight in more detail.

## **7.2 Civic Identity in the Digital Age**

As Chapters Five and Six elaborated, young people are experiencing tensions as they navigate their place in the world because society has expected little of them by way of civic engagement. Society has not expected young people to care about current events or to voice their opinions, and in some ways, the laws and regulations imposed by society make it difficult for young people to disprove these beliefs. Society has restricted young people's ability to participate based on their age, limited not only to voting, but also to community service activities, like volunteering. At 17 years old, Laura is not able to become an emergency medical technician (EMT), and at 16 years old, Kaitlyn is unable to volunteer at food pantries. While some young people feel the limitations their age has on their ability to be involved in formal community service and present themselves in ways that society expects (Schlenker, 2012), other young people have rejected society's expectations of them to be apathetic, and have found new, digitally mediated ways to become civically engaged to learn about current events and, in some cases, voice their opinions. The reciprocity hypothesis first mentioned in Chapter Two applies to the participants in this study. Young people's civic experiences are digitally mediated: learning about immigration via social media affects their beliefs and experiences of citizenship. These experiences then influence the actions young people take for civic engagement, like participating in a school walkout or Black Lives Matter march.

Young people like Tanesha believe it is important to be vocal to make change, and that it is by being vocal that one can share values and opinions and learn those of others, to further shape one's own beliefs. Young people are forming their civic identity through their engagement with news information and through interactions with others: Tanesha reads Tumblr pages related to current events and integrates the opinions of others into

her own worldview, and Elsie seeks out discussions with others who have opinions that differ from her own. While society evidently expects young people to not vocalize their opinions on issues of public concern, participants in this study presented themselves as civically engaged and demonstrated their concern related to the national immigration debate, particularly as they reflected on their conceptualizations of citizenship, which was discussed in Chapter Five. The primary area of worry for young people concerned Donald Trump's Tweets that reflected a growing anti-immigrant sentiment around the country.

Naomi shared her criticism of Donald Trump's insulting remarks on Twitter, and Martin and Sachi expressed concern that while social media can be used as a megaphone for one's voice, not all voices are sharing positive messages. This use of social media by public figures has made more young people aware of what each of the political parties represent, and the beliefs that each public figure stands for. As described in Chapter Six, young people in turn exhibit caution about sharing their own political beliefs on their social media profiles, for fear that someone might misinterpret their voice as it was presented through text. This is in contrast to Hess and McAvoy's (2015) finding that young people are most likely to communicate with each other about politics through social networking websites. Rather, most young people in this study show mixed interest in discussing their political beliefs with others. Those who are interested in learning from others do not often seek contact with others beyond their existing social network, despite the affordances of social media that would allow them to do so.

The young people who participated in this study shared their voices and opinions with me in the research context – but are often not comfortable enough to share their voices with the adults in their lives. For some young people, like Kenai, families do not respect or ask for the opinions of young people, an act that diminishes young people's sense of efficacy (Bandura, 2008). This challenge can be addressed when society has a better understanding of what shapes young people's civic identity, and how they are experiencing the world. Chapter Five detailed thematic ways in which young people identify themselves as citizens, and understand what it means to be civically engaged. The contemporary struggles of presenting the self and sharing one's voice that young people face have led to a new framework of civic identity, which will be presented in the following section.

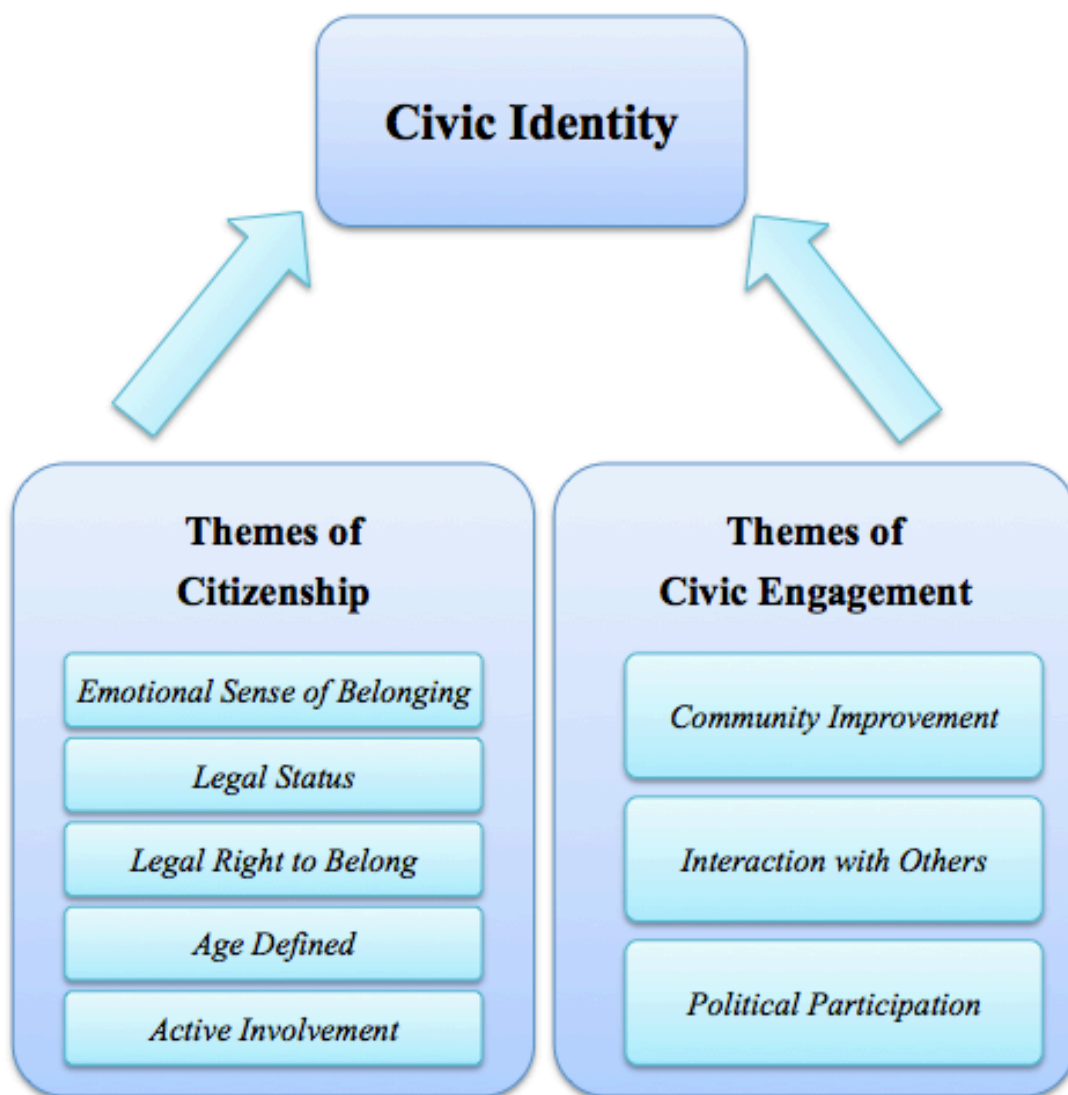
### **7.2.1 A New Framework of Civic Identity**

The second research question that motivated this study asks, *“What are the mechanisms through which young people form their civic identity in this digital era, and how do young people understand citizenship and civic engagement?”* As Chapters Two and Five discussed, civic identity is informed by social interaction theory and the theories put forth by Youniss and Yates (1997) and Knepfelkamp (2008). Social interaction theory posits that people view themselves through the role they play in public and how others react to those presentations of the self (Schlenker, 2012). People are considering who they would like to be, and who they feel they can be in a particular social context (Schlenker, 1985). Young people see themselves fitting into the world around them as measured by their presentations of the self. Like identity, civic identity is individually and socially constructed (Haste, 2004). Civic identity emerges from participation in informal and formal activities that develops a sense of agency and social responsibility (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997), as well as through engaging in conversations with others, to learn from different perspectives (Knepfelkamp, 2008). As society changes, the means of engagement change. So, as society becomes more defined by digitally mediated interactions, so too will civic engagement be defined.

The findings from this study improve the understanding of both the individual, reflective component of civic identity, measured by the conceptualizations of citizenship, and the collective component of how that individual engages with others in the social, political, and economic structures within their society. A new framework of civic identity, informed by the digitally mediated experiences of young people, emerged from this study, and includes five themes of citizenship and three themes of civic engagement. These themes are not mutually exclusive: young people can understand citizenship and civic engagement in any single or combination of themes. The components work together to contextualize the civic experiences of young people, which can inform civic education curriculum.

The Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003; 2005) models of citizenship detailed five models of citizenship that emerged from a study investigating 16- to 23-year-olds nearly two decades ago. Today, young people are surrounded by information and opinions on social media, which then inform their own beliefs about what it means to be a citizen,

what it means to be civically engaged, and issues of public concern. This framework of civic identity emerges from the experiences of young people and their sentiments about feeling caught in their life stage, wherein they need to develop their own views, but feel that no one will listen so therefore rarely express those views to others. This framework can help adults – parents, educators, and policymakers – to understand the civic experiences of young people, and revitalize civic education to best support young people in expressing their voices about issues of public concern. The framework is illustrated in Figure 4 below, and will be addressed in further detail in the sections that follow.



**Figure 4: Framework of Civic Identity.** Civic Identity is a function of two components: 1) conceptualizations of citizenship and 2) conceptualizations of civic engagement. Themes of citizenship and civic engagement emerged from the civic experiences of participants.

### ***The First Component: Conceptualizations of Citizenship***

The first component of civic identity involves conceptualizations of citizenship, the sense of how an individual develops and situates oneself and one's beliefs within a broader group of people. While citizenship has been an elusive concept (Ignatieff, 1995), conceptualizations most often include legal, social, and political components (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992; Osler & Starkey, 2006). The findings from this study reveal five themes of citizenship that emerged from the lived citizenship (Hall & Williamson, 1999) experiences of young people in this study:

- 1) *Emotional Sense of Belonging* – feeling like one belongs, and is a part of a community.
- 2) *Legal Status* – legally a member of the country, either by birth or naturalization; abiding by legal rights and responsibilities.
- 3) *Legal Right to Belong* – feeling like one belongs to a community, but also having legal rights and responsibilities.
- 4) *Age Defined* – being old enough, as defined by the law, to exercise the legal rights and responsibilities of citizenship, such as voting and participating in jury duty.
- 5) *Active Involvement* – actively contributing to the community.

Many of the same themes from the Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) findings, which were presented previously in Chapters Two and Five, apply today, but these themes are experienced in more nuanced and digitally mediated ways. Young people in this study recognize that citizenship is not universal, and has multiple meanings that are informed by individuals' personal experiences. Within the *Emotional Sense of Belonging* theme of citizenship, young people feel a part of something, and, to some extent, recognized and included. This *Emotional Sense of Belonging* theme of citizenship stands as its own theme as it represents the necessity of a sense of belonging within a community, a concept that has been well documented since the 1980s (Brint, 2001; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). Interestingly, young people link this theme of citizenship to both a sense of support (Brint, 2001) and to a physical place of "home." Several participants in this study connected their understanding of citizenship to the contemporary immigration debate that permeates

public discourse, and particularly for those young people whose parents were immigrants or who are immigrants themselves, alluding to their cultural identities and sense of belonging to their country of heritage was common. Young people were often informed about the immigration debate in digitally mediated ways, like Donald Trump's Tweets. The conditions under which the *Emotional Sense of Belonging* theme developed provide insight that not all young people feel that they belong, and that this idea of citizenship is not as universal as the young people of the Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) study experienced.

The *Legal Status* theme reflects one of the most common ways that people define citizenship as the legal rights and responsibilities that belong to anyone born in the United States and anyone who has become a naturalized citizen. Primarily, young people recognize their citizenship as a birthright because they were born in the country, and identify rights and responsibilities such as voting and jury duty, which aligned with previous research in this area (Haste, 2005; Kennedy, Hahn, & Lee, 2008). Again, the immigration debate largely informed young people's views on this matter. Even for young people whose families have been in the United States for generations, like Peter, it was still understood that there are many obstacles to legal citizenship, giving citizenship the "exclusive" status that Maisie discussed. While the *Legal Status* theme addresses the rights and duties that the Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) study describes, this theme also incorporates young people's understanding of the legal implications of being a citizen by birthright, being a citizen by naturalization, and not being a legal citizen at all. This theme is especially important to consider in contemporary society, as anti-immigrant sentiments exist not only in the United States, but in other nations as well (Osler & Starkey, 2018). With the understanding of the *Legal Status* theme of citizenship, it is possible to consider how public policy and public discourse may affect people's sense of citizenship, and responsibilities as a citizen. If individuals only see citizenship as the rights and responsibilities of engaging in society, those who are not citizens by birthright or naturalization may feel more excluded from the political process, and become disengaged – even though the young people of this study have demonstrated that civic engagement goes beyond political participation, which will be addressed in the next section.

Sometimes, tensions define citizenship for young people, particularly in the third theme,

the *Legal Right to Belong*. The tension between meanings of citizenship between belonging, legality, duties, and contributions to the community has been well documented in other studies (Brubaker, 1992; Haste, 2004; Lister, Smith, Middleton, & Cox, 2003; Young, 1995), and rings true in the findings presented in this thesis. Bibiana highlighted the complexity of growing up as an immigrant in the United States and assimilating to American culture, but lacking the legal rights to fully participate in society. Bibiana explained that while she was not born in the United States, she is confident in her knowledge about current events and how the government works. Bibiana noted that if it were not for her interaction with the news through social media, she would be less knowledgeable about societal issues, and she would not be pursuing a career in journalism. Perhaps Bibiana will someday produce news content of her own that will be shared among young people in digitally mediated ways, just as she accessed the information that prompted her to take action on social issues, actions that she cannot take because she is not a United States citizen. The *Legal Right to Belong* theme of citizenship emphasizes that it is possible and common for people to view citizenship as a function of one or more of the themes of citizenship in this framework. The tensions that connect the sense of belonging and the coveted, legally recognized form of citizenship are more likely to be felt in contemporary society, with international migration becoming more common as globalization continues (Colby & Ortman, 2014). As immigration policy changes, it is important to maintain awareness about the sentiments that young people, like Bibiana, would feel as they contribute to American society but are not able to vote for candidates and issues that matter to them, such as supporting immigration.

The theme of *Age Defined* citizenship relates to the *Legal Status* theme, in that this theme recognizes that there are certain legally imposed age restrictions on certain means of engaging in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Young people who do not view themselves and their peers as citizens tend to feel that their voices are not heard because they do not have the right to vote, and they are not yet 18 years old – an age that many young people and adults feel is a point at which young people will be taken seriously. When individuals are restricted by age, they may feel disempowered and choose not to engage. In some cases, they choose not to engage because they do not feel ready for the responsibility. This sense of readiness for responsibility is important to address because this is a case where parents, educators, and other adults in young

people's lives can scaffold young people with the skills they need to develop confidence in their voices and their abilities as citizens. Perhaps when young people develop this confidence, the *Age Defined* theme of citizenship will no longer be experienced by young people, as young people will recognize their ability to have their voices heard and make an impact before they reach voting age.

Finally, the *Active Involvement* theme of citizenship reflects the desire of many young people to participate in their communities and to help in any way they can – as Damon and Jane desire – and engage in political participation and keep informed about current events. Young people who described citizenship in these ways often alluded to tangible activities of civic engagement: cleaning the park, canvassing for local political candidates, and sharing political opinions with others. Young people also recognized that sharing opinions and exchanging ideas in digitally mediated ways is a form of active involvement. While young people expressed their frustration and concern for feeling unheard or restricted in their engagement because of their age, this fifth theme of citizenship outlines the ways in which young people identified that they *can* be civically engaged without reaching age 18. The *Active Involvement* theme often includes what many people view as “good” citizenship: improving society, acting responsibly, solving social problems, and helping the community (Kennedy, Hahn, & Lee, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). While good citizenship has become a normative concept (Ke & Starkey, 2014), the *Active Involvement* theme of citizenship illustrates that individuals are not always considering “good” or “bad” citizenship, but rather an *active* component that involves contributing to society. This final theme of citizenship leads to the three themes of civic engagement that compose the second component of this new framework of civic identity that will be addressed in the following section.

Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) propose that “right to a voice” ought to be its own theme of citizenship. The findings from this study suggest that citizenship ought to include this concept of voice, especially because not all young people feel like citizens, but participants never explicitly addressed the right to a voice as a conceptualization of citizenship. Young people may feel restricted for all sorts of reasons, mainly with consideration of age and legal citizenship status under the law. These individuals may be less likely to be engaged in the political world and demonstrate apathy, but they might use that frustration as a motivation to become engaged, like Addie and Veronica,

who took to social media to make their voices heard as a part of the Black Lives Matter movement. Despite the growing use of social media since 2007, it has had limited impact on how young people *think* about citizenship, but rather, has informed *how* young people are engaging civically. As the findings from this study show, feeling that one's voice is heard is essential to efficacy, but rather than this theme standing alone, it is embedded within each of the five themes presented here, and the three themes of civic engagement that the next section will describe.

### ***The Second Component: Civic Engagement***

Three themes of civic engagement contribute to the second component of the civic identity framework that emerged from this study, and build upon the definitions of civic engagement that were put forth in Chapters Two and Five. Rheingold (2008) explicitly addresses civic engagement as digitally mediated, "participation in the public sphere through direct experience with online publishing, discourse, debate, co-creation of culture, and collective action" (p. 102). Raynes-Goldie and Walker's (2008) definition is broad and applicable to the first theme of civic engagement in this framework, as "any activity aimed at improving one's community" (p. 162). The findings from this study suggest that the definitions of civic engagement by Rheingold (2008) and Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008) are too narrow, and therefore this study proposes that the definition of civic engagement include community improvement, interaction with others to develop and share beliefs, and political participation. These themes follow Bell's (2005) recommendation that the definition of civic engagement must include what is civic in the everyday lives of young people:

- 1) *Community Improvement* – activities to improve one's community vary considerably, and include the three most common means: participating in fundraising events, protecting the environment, and volunteering.
- 2) *Interaction with Others* – sharing opinions and experiences with other people, and learning from others' opinions and experiences in return.
- 3) *Political Participation* – formally engaging in democratic institutions through activities such as voting and protesting.

The three themes of civic engagement that emerged from the findings demonstrate that contrary to popular belief, young people are both thinking about civic engagement and engaging in civic activities. A great number of participants – 29 out of 46 participants – understood civic engagement through the *Community Improvement* theme, which includes participating in fundraising events, protecting the environment, and volunteering. This theme supports Raynes-Goldie and Walker's (2008) definition of civic engagement, and represents the civic experiences and beliefs of a majority of young people, who view improving the community as a key component of civic engagement (Kennedy, Hahn, & Lee, 2008). While many participants *understood* civic engagement in the more traditional sense of the term, in *practice* in contemporary society, many of these themes of civic engagement are experienced in digitally mediated ways. For example, within the *Community Improvement* theme lies fundraising events, which are often advertised and participated in through social media, such as the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, as experienced by Jane. Understanding that most young people view civic engagement in this way could encourage educators to embed service learning opportunities within their curriculum to encourage civic engagement through school (Annette, 2008; Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Dudley & Gitelson, 2002).

The second theme of civic engagement as *Interaction with Others* is a more nuanced theme that involves the sharing of opinions and experiences with other people, particularly related to politics. This theme is based on the notion that people must learn from each other to help form and share their beliefs about issues of public concern. Young people are interacting with others in myriad ways, from following public figures on Twitter, to participation in the Junior State of America, to posting opinions about police brutality on Instagram. Diana Hess (2009a) recognizes the importance of political discussions among young people, but in practice, very few participants recognize civic engagement as it is defined in this theme, and fewer still feel comfortable interacting with their peer groups about issues of public concern. Just as the *Age Defined* theme of citizenship related to young people's experiences of feeling unheard, so too does the *Interaction with Others* theme. It is important to recognize that the individuals who understand civic engagement as *Interaction with Others* may or may not seek out this type of interaction and dialogue on their own. For young people to fully realize this theme of civic engagement, they may need encouragement from their peers and the adults in their lives to encourage this type of dialogue. Organizations like the Junior

State of America encourage civic engagement through parliamentary style debate and volunteerism, a part of the *Community Improvement* theme, and through formally engaging with institutions through the *Political Participation* theme. The Junior State of America holds debate workshops and conferences to foster the development of youth voice. Further recommendations for empowering young people to have these kinds of conversations will follow in Section 7.3.1.

Finally, young people understand civic engagement as *Political Participation*, particularly through traditional means like voting and protesting. This third theme highlights traditional ways that individuals can participate politically, such as voting, but also encompasses the activities that young people can do before reaching voting age, such as protesting. Many young people acknowledged the limitations of their age on their ability to become civically engaged in this manner, because they are not yet eligible to vote. Yet, despite this obvious legal restriction on their formal political participation, a few young people do not let this age barrier prevent them from influencing an election: several participants discussed their attempts to convince parents and teachers to vote for the candidate or issue that they supported, a trend that has been recognized in previous research (Mesch & Coleman, 2007). Moreover, some communities allow – and even encourage – young people to vote on community issues, like Maisie, aged 14, who participated in her town’s budget vote, wherein anybody over the age of 12 is allowed to vote. With the understanding that young people conceptualize civic engagement as political participation, but often feel they are too young to participate and therefore their voices are unheard, parents and teachers can educate young people about the other means of political participation, and encourage young people to participate in the voting that they are eligible for. Political participation can include contacting elected officials to raise awareness about a concern, and, in the digital era, means of communicating with elected officials include interactions on social media and in other ways mediated by technology. Many participants of this study were involved in a citywide walkout of high schools as an effort to protest against budget cuts, which was organized through Facebook and other social media as a way for young people to alert others of the event, and to encourage participation from young people in schools across the city.

As there is no single agreed upon definition of civic engagement, it is important to identify the key elements of civic engagement that young people understand and experience in their everyday lives, and incorporate each of these themes into a wider understanding of civic engagement. With these three broad themes as a framework to understand civic engagement, individuals may evaluate the many ways that one could choose to engage, and choose which theme would be the most effective means to reach a certain end goal. The new framework of civic identity presented above provides insight into how young people see themselves fitting into today's society, and how they may contribute to it. The two components of civic identity, citizenship and civic engagement, work together to illustrate the reflective and participatory nature of civic identity. Both components are shaped by personal experiences, such as being born in or immigrating to the United States, and societal factors such as the immigration debate that spreads through social media and in peer-to-peer discussions. It is most important to recognize the personal nature of civic identity and that individuals' experiences shape how they view and experience civic identity. This framework is not designed to pigeonhole young people into specific categories of citizenship and civic engagement; rather, it presents the possibilities of views that young people may have, and can help adults gain an understanding of the types of personal experiences of young people that would inform their views and expressions of citizenship and civic engagement. Echoes of young people's concerns and feelings of being unheard ring throughout this framework, and further emphasize the need for increased opportunities for young people to develop their voices, and for adults to listen. This framework can be applied to future investigations into the civic experiences of young people, and to the development of civic education curriculum to address the needs of individuals at this life stage as they form their civic identity.

### **7.2.2 Digitally Mediated Civic Engagement: Opportunities for Youth Voice**

The third research question of this study asks, *“What are the means through which young people engage in the political world, and what factors contribute to this engagement?”* The participants in this study experienced civic engagement through digital means, and social media affords opportunities for young people to engage with news information and other people outside of their normal social sphere, but their

discussions of issues of public concern tend to occur mainly in the home. In the past, these sorts of discussions occurred in private spheres, like the home, but now, dialogue can be experienced through technology and can take place any time, anywhere (Hodgin, 2016). Contemporary society affords social media as modern soapboxes to give voice to those who have previously been excluded from the public sphere, and enable a greater distribution of ideas, collaboration, and collective action (Bennett, 2008; Erikson, 1968; James, 2014). Findings from this study demonstrate that there is little doubt that young people are being exposed to politics and issues of public concern online, and may have the inclination to participate through online means: social networks enable a lower cost to coordinate and communicate civic activities (Rheingold, 2008), such as learning about school walkouts and Black Lives Matter marches.

The Internet lends itself well to civic engagement, because as the speed with which information can be gathered and transmitted has increased, there is now a greater amount of accessible information and increased opportunities for interaction (Montgomery, 2008). Participants like Elsie and Tanesha are curious to learn others' opinions, and seek them out through conversations with peers in civic organizations like the Junior State of America, or reading others' reflections on current events on Tumblr. Social media impacts political expression worldwide: today, young people have the opportunity to interact with each other and with people in the public sphere through the type of civic engagement that Rheingold (2008) defines (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012). Over time, content creation and sharing has grown rapidly: social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr have enabled young people to share and repost content (Ito, et al., 2010), whether it is a photo from a weekend event, or a political statement originally posted by a public official (Bennett, 2008). Participation in new media technology can be empowering, and even ignite participation in the wider society (Hartmann, Carpentier, & Cammaerts, 2007; James, 2014), which the #NeverAgain movement demonstrates.

Many participants in this study follow current events that are relevant and convenient to them (Linton, 2015). Scholars have observed young people utilizing technology for civic purposes to learn about the issues of public concern (Davies & Eynon, 2013) that matter to them. Kaitlyn watches the news on television before she goes to school, but checks Twitter and Instagram throughout the day. Kaitlyn prefers to stay informed about

current events on a more regular basis, and Jillian relies on the text messages from her friends to alert her about top headlines of the day when she is otherwise too busy to seek the information on her own. Young people develop the habits and attitudes relevant to civic life when they first encounter the world of current events and political issues at this age (Levine, 2008), but they are not always expected to follow current events (Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007). It is important to note that there are well-documented discrepancies in how young people perceive and discuss current events, and experience efficacy. Individuals from wealthier backgrounds and parents with higher levels of education tend to discuss current events at home, an early form of civic engagement (Flanagan, 2013). Kahne and Middaugh (2009) found that higher-income families experience greater numbers of civic opportunities, such as participating on a campaign, protesting, and sitting on a board. Furthermore, this population of individuals often experience more classroom-based civic opportunities. Such disparities in education contribute to inequalities in later civic and political participation (Gimpel & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2009).

Young people engage in the political world through digital means. Contemporary society and the expectations of young people are factors that have contributed to this civic engagement: while society expects young people to not follow current events or care about issues of public concern, society expects young people to use social media. The young people in this study demonstrated that social media is one of the primary sources of news information, and a way for them to attempt to share their own voices. Even while participants in this study did not seem to view social media as a *formal* tool for civic engagement, many participants used social media for civic purposes. Jane used social media to engage in her community after discovering the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge on Instagram, while Addie and Veronica voiced their concerns about police brutality on their Instagram and Facebook pages. Young people of Boston used social media to organize a citywide school walkout to protest budget cuts to their schools. Jaden, Gwen, and Habibah all expressed their pride for taking a stand and making their generation more visible to public officials so that their voices would be heard. While civic engagement takes many different forms in the digital era (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010), civic education must be revitalized and improved in consideration of the contemporary

experiences of young people, and their needs for building efficacy and voice in this digital age.

### **7.3 Building Efficacy for Engagement in the Political World: A Case for Civic Education**

Chapter Six highlighted the significance of efficacy – the feeling that one’s voice is heard – as a factor for civic engagement among young people. Experiences of the participants in this study build on previous findings that young people feel disempowered and unheard, even while they are civically engaged. Key to an engaged citizenry is the feeling that one has the knowledge, skills, and power to enact change, and such civic efficacy is a goal of schooling (National Council for the Social Studies, 2008). Youniss and Yates (1997) highlight the importance of this sense of efficacy and the feeling that one’s voice is heard:

If individuals did not believe their actions counted, they would not feel responsible to register new voters, boycott, strike, march, argue politics, or join movements. Adults do these things because they believe democratic society depends on people acting democratically. It is important that the behaviors that make up adult agency are not extraordinary and have incipient forms in the repertoire of youth. (p. 28)

Research in the United States demonstrates that young people’s frustration with not being heard is widespread and longstanding (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; 2006; Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010). A survey by the National Association of Secretaries of State demonstrated that two thirds of young people agreed, “our generation has an important voice, but no one seems to hear it” (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006, p. 289). Similarly, the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study of young people and their civic practices in the United Kingdom concluded that there has been a steady increase in young people’s civic participation, but a decreased level of efficacy (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010). As they aged, the young people studied felt only moderately likely to feel that they, as individuals, could influence the political and social world (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010).

Young people have been limited in their ability to become engaged in their communities, especially because of the daily segregation of young people from adults and the negative stereotypes that adults have of youth as apathetic (Camino & Zeldin,

2002). In Chapter Four, Martin discussed his identity as a young black male, and how he needed to adapt his behavior and appearance for his own safety, even to attend a Black Lives Matter rally. Martin alluded to how he adjusted his own voice and manner of speaking in favor of personal safety and positive perceptions from others, and, in doing so, his voice is stifled, limiting his efficacy, a trend that has been observed among black youth (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009). Because of stereotypes that affect all young people and young people of color especially, young people are often viewed as disengaged. It is well documented, however, that young people are engaged, but do not feel heard (Mesch & Coleman, 2007). What makes one efficacious is having the civic skills necessary to participate, which includes collaboration, public speaking, protesting or petitioning for change (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003).

### **7.3.1 From Perspective Taking in the Classroom to Efficacy in the Community**

Few young people have been able to amplify their voices to engage in the way the young people of Parkland have. This is because the participants in this study have not had the same level of civic education and have not had a single cause with which they identify. Moreover, the young people who participated in this study are not as well networked and supported by their parents, teachers, and community leaders. This discrepancy in efficacy is correlated with a lack of civic knowledge, which in turn can be attributed to the steady replacement of civic education funding with funding for (STEM) subjects (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010). The quality or quantity of civic education experienced by the young people of Parkland served the #NeverAgain movement leaders well in providing them the educational foundation for civic engagement. Many of the participants in this study were not aware of “civic engagement” terminology, and generally have limited civic knowledge due to civic education being classified as “not a priority” for their school district (Boston Public Schools, Office of Data and Accountability, 2015). The Parkland youth had the educational resources and understanding of civics to have conversations with their peers in ways that the participants from Boston do not have. While the young people who participated in this study indicated their passion and personal connection for issues like the Black Lives Matter movement, it is also possible that there was not an incident immediate enough to the participants that would ignite a fire of activism, as the school

shooting had done in Parkland. It is crucial that the current generation, and generations to follow, is educated about how their government works, and how to become engaged and active citizens.

The findings from this study and recent events in the #NeverAgain movement suggest that the reprioritization of civic education in schools is imperative for providing young people in contemporary society with the skills and tools they need to build their efficacy (Rousseau & Warren, 2018). There are inequalities in efficacy itself, but fostering civic efficacy from an early age can promote sustained efficacy, which is one means to help close the civic empowerment gap (Serriere, 2014). While there is no single point in maturation when individuals learn about politics or active citizenship (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002), civic education should start in elementary school: it is possible to encourage civic habits in young people from an early age (Ito, et al., 2008). Civic habits include developing the ability to take perspectives of others, solve problems collectively, and participate in community service. All of these things can be done at all ages – in elementary school, for example, classroom meetings provide opportunity for discussions and collective problem solving. Young people of all ages should engage in personally meaningful civic activities in school, which can then inspire them to continue their actions later on in the community (Serriere, 2014).

Educators and policymakers must focus on reinvigorating civic education in schools because formal education is the only learning opportunity to which young people are “legally entitled” (Middaugh & Kirshner, 2015, p. 5). It is the right of all young people to be educated and equipped with the skills they need to engage in their society, and it is incumbent upon educators to scaffold young people’s development of these civic skills. With this trend in decreasing levels of civic knowledge, and concern for civic education, scholars have called for an updated civics curriculum (Middaugh & Kirshner, 2015). Recommendations from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) include student participation in some kind of democratic process, rather than listening to lectures on government (Korbey, 2017). A reinvigoration of civic education in schools can equip young people with knowledge and understanding about the political institutions – an understanding that would empower them to use their voices (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012). Programs and curriculum that promote understanding of social issues, sense of belonging, and agency

can contribute to civic identity and efficacy (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Shapiro & Brown, 2018; Youniss & Yates, 1997).

There is disagreement in public discourse about the role of the school in educating citizens. Should schools be devoid of politics and political discussion? Or should they be a place where students may safely engage in thoughtful and respectful discussions with other young people, some of whom have opposing views? Scholars recommend that young people have the opportunity to take the perspective of others by having discussions and debates about political and social issues with their classmates, because debate and dialogue are key to the development of one's civic identity. Respectfully engaging in conversations about controversial issues is therefore paramount to civic education (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Such discussions lead young people to report greater engagement in school, greater interest in politics, improved critical thinking skills, and higher civic knowledge and likelihood to participate in civic life later on (Gould, 2011). One way to reinvigorate civics curriculum to benefit young people's social perspective taking skills and awareness and understanding of issues of public concern is to include classroom discussions about current events and political issues.

Hess and McAvoy (2015) believe that schools should be a space for fostering perspective taking, and Hodgins (2016) agrees that core to civic participation are the skills to have discussions about political and social issues, which young people have often not had the opportunity to discuss in school (Vilchis, Scott, & Besaw, 2015). Diana Hess (2009a) found that civil political discussions in a classroom setting enable better critical thinking, communication, and interpersonal skills, and the development of attitudes and knowledge for engaged citizenship. Engaging in the discussion of social issues and public problems with people whose views differ from one's own can foster political tolerance, which in turn can lead to better policy decisions in the future (Hess, 2009b). Discussing these controversial topics will help young people develop their own voice and opinions and express them to others (McLeod & Shah, 2009).

Dias and Menezes (2014) call for experiential civic education through this type of dialogue, in which children are asked to solve a collective problem, and must "express their ideas ... cooperate, and negotiate" (p. 264). Schools are institutions that can provide young people with the opportunity to reason with others with different views

than their own (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). For example, young people from poor urban areas, like Jaden, are likely to have clarity about the issues that affect their neighborhoods and can provide a wealth of information and ideas to make positive changes in their communities (Hart & Kirshner, 2009), which young people from wealthier backgrounds, like Maisie, may not have considered. It is idealistic to believe that young people will carry out these conversations on their own, as findings in Chapter Six demonstrate. Even teachers struggle to cultivate a safe space in the classroom for civil discussion, and some teachers have avoided civics entirely because they do not want to ignite hostility or discord in their classroom (Korbey, 2017). Civic education must recognize that students may have multiple and flexible identities (Ong, 1999), and also have experiences to share and voices to be heard.

Political efficacy is positively correlated with the opportunity to discuss controversial issues in the classroom (Hahn, 2010; Levy, 2011; Serriere, 2014; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001) and build perspective-taking skills as discussed in this section. Given the hesitation that young people have when thinking about discussing politics or issues of public concern with their friends, young people could benefit from opportunities to develop their perspective taking skills so that future digitally mediated interactions would be less daunting. Friendships are an effective way for young people to gain practice in perspective taking (Flanagan, 2013) and to test out their political opinions (Livingstone, Couldry, & Markham, 2007), but the participants in this study are most concerned that if they discover their friend has a view or opinion that differs from their own, they will lose that friendship. Kaitlyn and Addie demonstrate that for young people, it seems that sometimes friendship is more important than understanding what the beliefs of that friend are: perhaps young people are also barriers to their peers' voices being heard. Young people should encourage each other to take each other's perspectives and develop their own voices. Osler and Starkey (2018) suggest that when young people have skills for efficacy and the opportunity to practice those skills, they will then be able to use those skills to build a more cohesive and peaceful society. The more voices there are, the more young people could be amplified as a group, and their concerns would be heard.

Unmistakably, a sense of agency is key to civic identity and engagement (Watts & Guessous, 2006; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Increasing young people's sense of efficacy

can be done through a reinvigoration of civic education and opportunities for engagement, and by carefully listening to the voices of young people. Young people have opinions and beliefs about politics, and listening to them can provide insight into what democracy will be like in the future (Linton, 2015) because young people *are* the future. One way for young people to start having a say is in their schools, where they can practice articulating their concerns at a more immediate and local level (Fielding, 2004). Young people are socially positioned to be experts on young people’s experiences, and should be treated as authorities on these matters (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003). Young people need positive reinforcement – when they are asked to share their voice, and adults listen, young people will be more empowered to continue sharing their voice (Bandura, 2008). Civic education can have a positive impact on self-efficacy, primarily through providing young people with the skills and knowledge they need to feel able and equipped to make a difference in their family, school, and community (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010). But, while educators must focus on efficacy, it is important to remember to nurture the awareness of how institutions work and what roadblocks they might face so that the red tape does not impact young people’s efficacy (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Results from this study build on this finding, and demonstrate that societal roadblocks – society’s positioning of young people as “just kids” – are a major factor in preventing young people from having a voice.

### **7.3.2 Civic Education for Digitally Mediated Civic Engagement**

Technology has the potential to be a powerful tool for civic engagement when young people know how to use it for that purpose, as illustrated by the #NeverAgain movement. The young people of Parkland were able to circumvent societal roadblocks and harness their civic knowledge to make their voices heard. Scholars note that the Parkland students successfully created the #NeverAgain movement that gained traction on social media, but it was their civic education and the values of their school and school district that equipped them with the skills they needed to best interact with and pressure lawmakers to enact stricter gun control (Rousseau & Warren, 2018). In this section, I use the #NeverAgain movement to illustrate the importance of civic education, and how it can be reinvigorated for the digital era.

The student leaders at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were part of the school newspaper and broadcast journalism programs, and there is a school district-wide debate program that teaches public speaking to students from a young age (Lithwick, 2018), suggesting that the school values its students and their engagement with the wider world. Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is committed to student voice, having invited Mary Beth Tinker, who had an important role in the *Tinker v. Des Moines* free speech Supreme Court case, to speak to students (Lithwick, 2018). The Black Lives Matter movement, as discussed in Chapter Six, and the #NeverAgain movement are similar in that they harness digital tools for amplifying the voices and experiences of those affected by the tragedies that sparked the movements. However, the #NeverAgain movement has the privilege of arising from a well-resourced high school and an affluent community (Lithwick, 2018), privileges which the students acknowledge and seek to use to attract national attention and advocate for policy reform to affect overall gun statistics. The young people who spearheaded the #NeverAgain movement do not want just white people or black people to be protected, they want everyone to be protected. This privilege and power have united them with other student-led gun-reform groups in Chicago and other cities riddled with gun violence (Alter, 2018). At the time of writing, the young people of Parkland launched a voter mobilization bus tour, called the Road to Change, that will make over 50 stops in 20 states, stops that will include areas affected by gun violence and also areas where there is a strong pro-gun culture (Booker, 2018). This voter registration effort comes just before the 2018 midterm elections in the United States, to mobilize young voters to turn out to the polls to vote in elections that normally experiences low youth voter turnout (Booker, 2018).

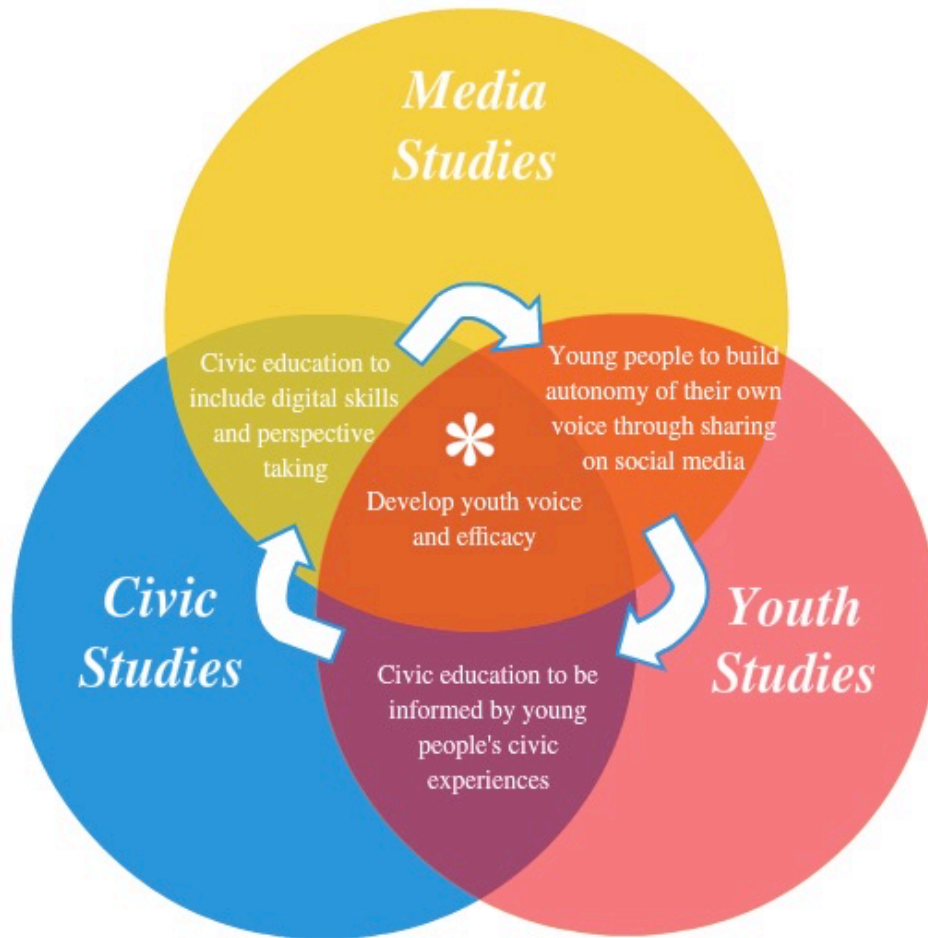
The young people of Parkland understood that they could reach a large audience through social media, which was used as a tool because they already possessed the knowledge of how government and special interest groups work. The young people who created the #NeverAgain movement harnessed the skills they had gained through their learning environment, and engaged their immediate network to begin what is now a widespread social movement. Civic engagement in the digital era arises from networks and learning environments (Middaugh & Kirshner, 2015). Young people in Parkland reached out to their community for support in digital mediated ways, but social media may have seemed like an afterthought because it was not *consciously* used as a tool for this specific civic purpose – social media were merely used to spread voice and

awareness and spark change. In the future, civics curriculum must address how to harness these digital tools for civic purposes, in addition to focusing on the institutions of democracy and civic engagement – a recommendation that will be further explored in this section. While the Parkland activists demonstrate that it is not necessary to have formal knowledge of how to utilize technology for civic engagement, it is imperative to have knowledge about how government works and how to assert pressure on certain points in government to enact change. In contemporary society, many interactions with public officials are digitally mediated, and therefore civics curriculum must address these means of engagement.

It is evident that in contemporary society, young people have become civically engaged in digitally mediated ways. Young people access news information through newspapers and social media, and form their opinions by staying informed about current events and other's opinions, such as reading Tumblr posts like Tanesha does. Some young people, like Elsie and Imani, choose not to post political content on social media or share with their peers that they have been watching the news so as to conform to what adults think young people are doing. Young people also organize and participate in protests using communications through social media, as evidenced by the school walkouts and #NeverAgain movement. Scholars, civic activists, and technology designers are all interested in the “empowerment potential of social media” (Livingstone, 2010, p. 1), and interest in this area continues to grow. Schools are influenced by the social and political climate of the country (Hess & McAvoy, 2015), and as schools are influenced by external factors, there may not ever be a perfect time to engage in this type of education reform, but it must be done. In the digital era, technology is embedded in daily life, and therefore educators must address the ways in which young people are already engaging in the political world through digital means, and scaffold the skills that young people need to develop and share their voices.

A curriculum that combines digital literacy and civic learning is key to preparing young people for civic engagement in contemporary society (Hodgin, 2016). Teachers already incorporate new media into learning activities in the classroom (Beach & O'Brien, 2012; Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & López, 2013; Ohler, 2011), so digitally mediated civic engagement could be added to this pre-existing curriculum. Educators must cultivate what Vilchis, Scott, & Besaw (2015) call techno-social literacy: integrating digital skills

and social emotional education into other areas in the curriculum, and civics can be embedded throughout. This might involve incorporating a civics portfolio for all students, where they have a collection of their posted writing, videos, reflecting on their civic and political actions (Kahne, Ullman, & Middaugh, 2011), such as blogs. Such technologies can aid young people in developing their voice (Buckingham & de Block, 2007). Blogging can help young people develop and articulate their perspectives and opinions on civic issues with a sense of authority and ownership over their opinions (Schultz, Hodgin, & Paraiso, 2015). Jenkins (2008) argues that the production and circulation of this type of media is important in shaping wider public dialogue. When young people have the opportunity to practice this through blogging and creating media in school, young people can learn to find their own voices when they reach the public stage (Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2016). Moreover, within these collaborative exercises that involve creating original content and sharing with others, experienced students can help their less experienced peers acquire knowledge and skills to use the technology and become confident in sharing their opinions with a wider social network (Jenkins, 2009). Curriculum that explicitly develops the skills for productive digitally mediated dialogue and engagement helps students build confidence in sharing their perspectives and “appreciate feedback” from others when they voice their opinions (Middaugh, 2016, p. 3). Figure 5 illustrates how the recommendations presented above may inform and enhance young people’s sense of efficacy and help them to develop their voice. Figure 5 also demonstrates how research in the three fields in which the study is situated have informed the recommendations for transforming civic education with the aim of enhancing youth efficacy and voice in contemporary society.



**Figure 5: Recommendations for Improving Youth Voice and Efficacy through Civic Education.** Civic education should be reinvigorated for contemporary society and include schooling on digitally mediated ways of civic engagement that can improve perspective taking and overall efficacy. Civic education must be informed by the civic experiences of young people, as illustrated in the framework of civic identity presented in Figure 4.

There are, however, some caveats and cautions related to this type of civic education. If teachers elect to use social media platforms in schools, teachers must ensure they discuss Internet safety and privacy with students as a part of teaching them digital skills, and must consider the diversity of technology use among young people. It is important to highlight that schools cannot require all students to have their own device or turn to technology as a platform from which to share their voice, because some students might not be interested in or motivated to use it. It is also imperative that educators do not assume that all of their students have access to technology or the knowledge to utilize it in the ways discussed here and in other scholars' recommendations. Educators should demonstrate that technology and social media is an option for civic engagement that is

available, but not required, for young people to engage efficaciously. Furthermore, it is difficult to teach and encourage students to be autonomous and develop their own voices when there is a religious underpinning to school values (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). For example, one of the settings for data collection for this study was a private, Catholic high school. Schools like this one might have difficulty implementing the type of civic education I have advocated for because they are also concerned about the sorts of issues of public concern in which their students are involved. With all of this in mind, however, it is important to reiterate that when young people learn how to engage in digitally mediated ways, they become more likely to become civically engaged (Kahne, Ullman, & Middaugh, 2011).

It is also important to acknowledge that these curriculum recommendations alone will not boost efficacy, and that efficacy is not the single solution to encourage young people to share their voice and increase civic engagement; rather, it is a contributing factor in the wider discussion about young people's civic engagement today. Society perceives that youth are engaging in the same way as the leaders of the #NeverAgain movement, but that is not always the case. A great number of young people are not as well resourced and well-networked as the young people from Parkland. People from lower socioeconomic backgrounds find it challenging to feel a sense of efficacy, and will be able to change much less than those from wealthier backgrounds as they are not as civically engaged (Godfrey & Cherng, 2016; Levinson, 2010). These social class issues are highlighted in the case of the #NeverAgain movement, wherein the movement's organizers were from an affluent community and education system that valued civic education. Community values and the attitudes of adults toward young people play a role in youth efficacy, as evidenced by the experiences of the participants in this study, and by the young people of Parkland. The wider discussion about youth engagement and efficacy must come from a society that believes in and listens to the voices of young people. In addition to the curriculum recommendations mentioned throughout this section, communities and school districts must adapt their values to support young people in their development of civic identity and efficacy.

# Chapter Eight | Conclusion

## Looking to the Future

### 8.1 Overview

The public has perceived young people to be disengaged, but in reality, they *are* engaged, just in different ways than society expects them to be. In contemporary society, voices and opinions surround young people – on the Internet, at school, in the community – and it was hoped that technology would give young people a sense of efficacy that they would be able to share their voice. However, the findings presented in this thesis demonstrated that even in contemporary society, young people still feel their voices are not heard, and do not have structured opportunities to develop their own voice at home and in an educational setting. In Chapter Six, Maisie highlighted a key challenge: young people are both expected and not expected to know things that will make them engaged and responsible citizens later on, and young people are frustrated by the expectations that society has of them, and by the limited power of their voices.

Young people have felt unheard for decades (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; 2006; Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010), but some young people have chosen to use social media as platforms to both inform and share their views beyond the political discussions they listen to in the home. Young people are in a distinct life stage, but do not always have the support from family, friends, teachers, communities, and technological platforms to navigate their civic identity formation and engage in their communities and current events as fully as they might wish to. Previous research advocates for families and educators to serve as mentors and provide the foundation and

additional scaffolding for young people to develop as people and as members of communities with a greater sense of efficacy (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). Young people's peers, parents, teachers, community leaders, and policymakers all must do their part to listen to the concerns of young people, and the issues that matter to them. Osler and Starkey (2018) advocate for other local institutions beyond schools to be involved in civic education, such as museums, to extend the curriculum and build on young people's personal histories. Most importantly, there must be a shift in civic education to incorporate opportunities for political discussions in the classroom, which in turn lead to greater ownership over one's opinions and an increase in efficacy. Civics curriculum must also be adapted to include recommendations for digitally mediated civic engagement, should the trend continue that young people access information about issues of public concern in digitally mediated ways, and decide that their voices could best be heard in digitally mediated ways.

Having presented the literature review in Chapter Two, the findings in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, and the implications of those findings in Chapter Seven, this concluding chapter returns to the three research questions that framed this study and outlines several conclusions that the main findings informed. This chapter expounds on the contributions of this study, as well as suggested directions for future research. This study builds theory by contributing a civic identity framework based on youth voice, and guides future research by suggesting how educators might incorporate the affordances of the digital world in civic education.

## **8.2 Main Findings**

The findings of this study demonstrated that young people present themselves to others in digitally mediated ways, and are often faced with the challenge of deciding which aspects of the self to keep private, and which to share with others. When young people begin to understand themselves, they can also understand how they fit in with their families, schools, and communities, and develop civic identity. The study further discovered that young people conceptualize the two components of civic identity – citizenship and civic engagement – in different ways. Importantly, this study uncovered an overarching challenge for young people: a low sense of efficacy, even when social media has become a megaphone for people to make their voices heard. This low self-

efficacy has transpired in the wider social context in which young people live: there are many expectations that society has of young people, which young people see as road blocks to their potential for effecting change. Efficacy is low for reasons beyond the perception that teenagers are “too young.” Some young people feel that if they are not legal citizens then they do not have the same rights as others who are legal citizens, and others feel that they do not have a large enough audience for their voice to make a difference. Moreover, the idea that all young people do not have “full citizenship” because they are not of voting age may permeate the feeling that politics is not relevant to them. Furthermore, the notion that their ideas and beliefs are not fully formed and the perception that no one will listen to them makes young people less likely to share their views, because they feel they have no authority.

I hypothesized that in contemporary society, young people would have more of an opportunity for their voices to be heard through digital outlets such as social media, but participants’ experiences demonstrated this is not always the case. While news information and people’s opinions surround young people every day, informing young people’s beliefs and understanding of issues of public concern, few participants in this study turned to technology and social media to make their voices heard. These findings have brought to light certain areas where educators, parents, and policymakers can improve their support for young people’s civic identity formation and sense of self-efficacy. This new framework of civic identity reflects the experiences and conceptualizations of young people in today’s world, which can benefit young people, educators, parents, and policymakers. When educators, parents, and policymakers understand the perspectives of young people, they can better provide the environment, support, and opportunities that young people need to develop their sense of efficacy.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, with the knowledge available about the movement that emerged from the engagement and voices of young people after the shooting in Parkland, it seems that the students in Parkland had the education and background knowledge they needed in order to harness technology and social media as megaphones for their voices. The participants in this study were not afforded the same educational experiences, and they are likely not the only young people in America to have had a lack of civic exposure and knowledge about means of civic engagement for today’s world. This suggests that the decline in civic education is not only palpable, but that

civic education must be adapted for contemporary society. In schools, teachers can provide a structured, safe environment for talking about politics as a part of social studies and civic education curricula, as suggested by Hess and McAvoy (2014), to help young people better understand the worldviews of their peers and themselves. Similarly, at home, parents can exercise more effort in talking to their children about current events, politics, and family values, and ask questions of their children to help them form their beliefs. Educators and parents alike can support young people's growth as individuals with political voice by listening to and encouraging the development of young people's ideas and actions, allowing them to learn from experiences such as protests, sharing beliefs online, and learning from others in online communities (Schultz, Hodgin, & Paraiso, 2015). Finally, policymakers can do better to include young people in the political process to ensure their voices are heard across a wider platform, by following the example set forth by a city in which this study was situated, and invite young people to participate in a youth council and share opinions on issues at local and national levels.

### **8.3 Contributions**

The theoretical and educational contributions of this study are twofold. Firstly, a new framework of civic identity emerged from the findings, which illustrates five themes of citizenship and three themes of civic engagement, which reflect the lives of young people today, whose civic experiences are often digitally mediated. This framework can inform future investigations into the civic experiences of young people in other educational, geographical, and sociopolitical contexts. Secondly, this study has identified ways in which civic education can be improved to nurture young people's sense of efficacy, and empowerment to use their voices.

#### **8.3.1 Theoretical Contribution: A New Framework of Civic Identity**

The new framework of civic identity reflects how young people are defining citizenship and how young people are defining and experiencing civic engagement. This new framework of civic identity provides insight into how young people see themselves fitting into today's society, and how they may contribute to it. This framework of civic identity includes the perspective of young people growing up in contemporary society, and informs the themes of citizenship and civic engagement by including young

people's digitally mediated civic experiences. In the digital era, the constant stream of information and opinions that surround young people informs their understanding of citizenship. Throughout the period of data collection for this study, the immigration debate dominated public discourse, and the media attention directed to Donald Trump's contributions to the matter through Twitter informed young people's beliefs and concerns about citizenship, particularly within the *Emotional Sense of Belonging*, *Legal Status*, and *Legal Right to Belong* themes. The themes of citizenship in this new framework of civic identity build upon the models of citizenship that emerged from the Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox (2003) study to include not only young people's experiences in today's digital era, but their nuanced understandings that citizenship is not universal even though it is a birthright of some. This framework includes a new theme of citizenship that has previously not been discussed, which defines citizenship by age. There are legally imposed age restrictions on certain means of engaging in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, which impacts young people's feeling that their voices are not heard. Moreover, this framework of civic identity includes a focus on *active* citizenship, rather than "good" or "bad" citizenship, which other models acknowledge as a normative concept (Ke & Starkey, 2014).

Finally, this framework of civic identity highlights three themes of civic engagement, which are often experienced by young people in digitally mediated ways. For example, within the *Community Improvement* theme are fundraising events, which are often advertised and participated in through social media. The *Interaction with Others* theme manifests itself in myriad ways, from young people following public figures on Twitter, to participation in the Junior State of America, to posting opinions about police brutality on Instagram. Finally, young people experiencing civic engagement as the *Political Participation* theme encompasses organizing protests in digitally mediated ways, as well as contacting political leaders through social media.

### **8.3.2 Educational Contribution: Civic Education Curriculum for the Digital Age**

The findings of this study reveal that a lack of efficacy is a contributing factor to the perceived civic disengagement among young people. Efficacy, or a person's belief in their capabilities to make a difference, is key to young people's motivation to become

civically engaged (Bandura, 1977). Successes build self-efficacy, whereas failures undermine it (Bandura, 2008). As findings from this study revealed, young people are not afforded many opportunities to be successful in effecting change, particularly because they are not persuaded by society to believe in their efforts. Young people will exert more effort if they are persuaded to believe in themselves, which then increases their chances of success. Responsibility for making young people's voices heard does not only lie within each young person to gain confidence to develop and voice their opinions, but it falls on adults, too. This study encourages adults, especially educators and policymakers, to listen to the voices of young people when creating policies, particularly policies that will have a lasting impact on future generations, which will both greatly inform policy and improve efficacy among young people.

As of 2012, the United States Department of Education wanted to strengthen civic education (Tynes & Monterosa, 2015), but still, civic education curriculum has been lacking (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Following the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, teachers and school leaders have found a sense of urgency to equip their students with skills to become active, contributing citizens who understand how to negotiate and appreciate other perspectives (Tugend, 2018). As of March 2018, the Massachusetts State Senate has proposed An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2018). This study advocates for an advancement of civic education in schools, in which schools provide space for civil discourse and critical thinking about current events in politics to help young people form their civic identities and participate civically. Engaging in dialogue with others about issues of public concern allows young people to learn about perspectives that differ from their own, and to develop and take ownership over their own opinions and ideas, empowering them to use their voices.

Furthermore, curriculum that explicitly develops the skills for productive digitally mediated civic engagement can help young people become better prepared for civic engagement in contemporary society. Curriculum must also include practices that enable young people to have media literacy, to best discern the messages that surround them through media sources from television and newspapers to Twitter news alerts. This includes what Vilchis, Scott, & Besaw (2015) call techno-social literacy: integrating digital skills and social emotional education into other areas in the curriculum. This

would scaffold the skills necessary for young people to find, evaluate, and use information (Buckingham, 2013), and interact with others to have dialogue – digitally mediated or otherwise – about issues of public concern.

#### **8.4 Avenues for Future Research**

The findings from and implications of this study bring new opportunities for research in civic studies. Understanding the civic experiences of American young people goes beyond what has been found in this study: young people from across America, not just in the geographical location where fieldwork was conducted, must be included, so that academics, educators, and policymakers can gain understanding of young people’s civic experiences in other types of communities. This study investigated a liberal urban area in the Northeastern United States, a democratic nation. Future research can use similar methods to investigate the trends in young people’s civic identity development and sense of efficacy in other geographical regions. It would be most important to look at these trends on a global scale, and examine the differences in how young people come to understand their civic identity within different country settings in which young people might be perceived differently from the ways in which they are perceived in the United States.

Moreover, with the understanding that young people have a low sense of efficacy, and that teachers wish to reinvigorate civic education, it is important for scholars to investigate how the civics classroom experience contributes to efficacy. In the United States, civics is most often taught within the Social Studies curriculum, which also includes history and geography. Further qualitative research could be conducted to understand how teachers design civics curriculum and implement this curriculum in their classrooms. Interviews with teachers about their intentions and pedagogical approach would be a logical first step in this process, followed by classroom observations and interviews with young people about their experiences. What impact does this new civics curriculum, and the way it is delivered, have on young people’s efficacy? How are teachers incorporating technology and digitally mediated forms of civic engagement in this curriculum?

Furthermore, technology is changing, and will continue to change, at a rapid pace. While we cannot assume that young people will adopt every new form of social media (boyd, 2009), research into young people's technology use, civic education, and civic engagement must be on going, as new technologies will continue to integrate themselves into the daily lives and experiences of young people. Research must continue to examine the ubiquity of technology in daily life, and specifically address the civic applications – and potential civic consequences – of new technologies. In the field of education, research must inspect whether and how these new technologies are being utilized in the civic education curriculum, and how effective these new curricular and civic engagement methods turn out to be.

With the understanding that the future of technology is ever changing, the results from this study also bring about a new motivation for scholars to continue studying the trends in technology use among adolescents in tandem with the civic applications of technology. To do this, scholars could analyze qualitative data from social media in the form of posts by young people related to civic engagement. This research would inform academics about what young people are posting and saying on social media related to issues of public concern, and what strategies young people are using when organizing a protest, march, or civic action through social media. Data from social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram would be suitable for investigating these questions. Results from this type of research would inform academics and educators about how these social media platforms might be employed in the classroom to foster a greater sense of self-efficacy among young people.

When conducting research in the areas mentioned above, researchers should consider potential limitations. First, future research in this area should have resources for interviewing young people and teachers across a range of urban and rural educational settings, to aid in the examination of possible differences between those differing political communities. During the data collection period for this study, I learned the importance of incentives for participation, especially when working with young participants of low-income backgrounds who were concerned that their participation in research would take away from the hours they might work at a part-time job to earn income. It is also important for future research to consider participant recruitment pools. Given the educational nature of the research for this study, recruitment through schools

and after school programs was employed to access as many young people in the desired age population as possible. Support and approval from large school districts and their equivalent ethics review boards is essential, as school leaders feel more comfortable agreeing to their students' and teachers' participation in research when their superiors agree to the research taking place. Moreover, support from the school district could yield a sample of participants with even more variation within the civic teaching and learning experiences illustrated in this study.

### **8.5 Looking to the Future**

Young people are at a time in their lives during which they are grappling with their own identity, and how they see themselves fitting into the world around them, and how they might contribute to society in the future. Young people have proven that they are engaged in their communities, and they are passionate about issues of public concern, particularly those issues that personally affect them and those in their immediate familial and social circles. But these young people, between the ages of 14 and 17 years old, have often been excluded from the political process because the public perceives them to be disengaged, and they have been excluded from research on youth civic engagement because they have not yet reached voting age. Data from this study reveals that young people feel this exclusion deeply, and it impacts their sense of efficacy. It is immensely important to consider and include youth voice, not only in government and politics, but in research as well. Researchers must continue to study young people before they reach voting age. As the participants in this study demonstrated, young people are more than capable of sharing their experiences – I found that, in fact, the participants in this study were eager and willing to share their voices, and relieved that an adult (myself, the researcher) genuinely wanted to learn about their lives, experiences, and thoughts. Young people have the right to be heard. As academics, we can do our part to include young people in the research process, public engagement activities, and by devoting future research to investigating this population further.

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## Appendices | Appendix A

# Pilot Interview Schedule

### **Pilot Interview -- Introduction**

Thank you for coming to chat with me, it's really good to be able to talk to you. My name is Julianne and I am working on a project with Oxford University that looks into how people your age think about themselves, their communities, and what they do online with social media. I am really interested in anything you have to say about these things – there are no right answers that we're hoping to hear – just tell me what *you* think.

I'm recording the interview so that we can listen to all the different things people have told us later on. But everything you say is private and we certainly won't discuss anything you talk about with people who know you.

I also want to mention that you are welcome to stop the interview at any point in time.

Before we begin the process, I would like to share with you this information sheet that has more details about the research. Please take a few minutes to read through it.

Do you have any questions for me? Please fill out this consent form so I can keep track of the number of students who have agreed to participate.

Right, let's get started.

**Tell me about yourself. How would others (family and friends) describe you?**

- To what extent do you think that is true?
- How would you characterize yourself?

**What kinds of things are you thinking about, now that I've asked you to think about yourself?**

- What helps you figure out your own identity? (i.e., school, family, friends)
- What are some ways in which you like to show people who you are when you're out and about in your community?

**Tell me about your friends. What kinds of things do you like to do with your friends? How do you interact?**

- Some people say that they interact with their friends using technology. How about for you? Do you interact with your friends with technology (i.e., texting, social media)?

**Let's talk about the idea of community a little bit. Do you consider yourself a member of a community/communities? Why/Why not?**

- Are you involved in a community?
  - If respondent says yes: what are some of the reasons why you are involved in your community?
  - If respondent says no: what are some of the reasons why you decide not to be involved in your community? Is there anything that puts you off about being involved?
- Are your family/friends engaged in the community?
  - If respondent says yes: Who are you thinking about? What is their relationship to you? What kinds of activities do they do?
  - If respondent says no: Why do you think they aren't engaged?
  - If respondent says they are not sure: Can you think of reasons why someone might or might not be engaged in the community?

**Do you consider yourself a "citizen?" of what? Why or why not? (Weinstein, Rundle, & James, 2015)**

- Is that what citizenship means to you?
- What does it mean to be a "good citizen" or a "bad citizen"?
- When I say "civic" what does that word mean to you?
  - o If respondent not sure what that word means, prompt with other related words like "civic education"

### **What actions do you think of as civic engagement?**

- Which definition of civic engagement do you think fits the most with how you think about the idea?
  - o **Definition 1:** “participation in the public sphere through direct experience with online publishing, discourse, debate, cocreation of culture, and collective action” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 102)
  - o **Definition 2:** “any activity aimed at improving one’s community” (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008)
- What actions would qualify as "civic engagement"?
  
- Do you think that any of the actions you mentioned before (regarding what you do after you see something on social media) qualify as civic engagement?

### **Let’s move onto another topic: technology. When I say "technology", I mean anything that you can do digitally... on a smartphone, computer, laptop, netbook, tablet, and game consoles (Davies & Eynon, Teenagers and Technology, 2013). With that definition in mind, what do you use technology for in your life?**

- Tell me about the kinds of things you do with technology.
- You mentioned that you do [.....] Can you tell me about how you've used technology in the past few years?
- What is good/helpful about technology? What are some drawbacks to using technology?

### **If respondent says that part of their technology use is social media: Thinking back to how you described yourself earlier when we first started talking, how well do you think that your social media profile(s) represent that? (Weinstein, 2014)**

- If you use social media, do you create content online? What do you post? Why?
  - o Do you look at what other people post online? Why or why not? What sorts of things interest you?

### **How easy for you is it to get online?**

- Do you have your own phone/computer/laptop to connect to the Internet?
  
- Do you follow the news/current events? Why or why not?
  
- If a respondent says they have difficulty getting online, or that they rarely go online, Any reason why not? Is it difficult to get an Internet connection at home? Do you use school computers after lessons or during breaks to get online?

### **How do you get information about current events?**

- Who/what sources do you trust? What makes you feel like you can trust certain sources?
- How do you know the information is accurate/reputable?

**Do you follow political/news sources on social media?**

- If respondent says yes: How do you engage with the information (i.e., repost, re-Tweet)? What happens after that?
- If respondent says no, *how important is it to you to get this information? What puts you off from following this type of information on social media?*

**Are you ever prompted to take action based on what you see online/hear from a friend/trusted source via social media or the Internet?**

- If so, what kind of action do you take?
- Have you taken that kind of action before? Did someone show you?
- Have there ever been times when you wanted to start a conversation about something that you saw online, but couldn't? Why do you think that was?
- If a respondent says no, *are you ever prompted to take action based on what you see or hear from friends offline?*

**Do you talk to your friends or others close to you about what you or other people post?**

- How do you talk about it? (i.e., email, Facebook chat, text, phone, in-person)
- How do these discussions begin? (i.e., do you initiate the discussion, jump in on the discussion, and on what platform do they occur?)
  - o Do you enter these discussions with specific goals or intentions for the discussion? (i.e., some people have positive intentions, whereas others troll these discussions online to start negative, counter-productive dialogue)
- How would you characterize these discussions? (i.e., respectful, angry...)
- In your opinion, do you think social media and technology has changed the way people interact with each other?
  - o If so, do you think the change has been positive or negative? Why do you think that is?

## Appendices | Appendix B

### Phase One Interview Schedule

Thank you for coming to chat with me, it's really good to be able to talk to you. My name is Julianne and I am working on a project with Oxford University that looks into how people your age think about themselves, their communities, and what they do online with social media. I am really interested in anything you have to say about these things – there are no right answers that we're hoping to hear – just tell me what *you* think.

I'm recording the interview so that we can listen to all the different things people have told us later on. But everything you say is private and we certainly won't discuss anything you talk about with people who know you.

I also want to mention that you are welcome to stop the interview at any point in time.

Before we begin the process, I would like to share with you this information sheet that has more details about the research. Please take a few minutes to read through it.

Do you have any questions for me? Please fill out this consent form so I can keep track of the number of students who have agreed to participate.

Right, let's get started.

**Tell me about yourself. What do you like? What interests you?**

- How would your family and friends describe you? To what extent do you think that's true?
- How would you characterize yourself?
- What helps you figure out who you are?
- What are some ways you like to show people who you are?

**Tell me about your friends. What kinds of things do you like to do together?**

- How do you interact with your friends?
- Do you and your friends like to use technology to interact with each other?

## **COMMUNITY**

**Do you consider yourself a member of a community/communities? Why? Why not?**

- What kinds of things do you do to show that you are a member of the community?
- Are you involved in your community?
- Why are you involved?

**How often do you think about being involved in your community?**

- How important is it to you to be involved in your community?

**How often do you think about current events in your community?**

- How important is it to you to know about events in your community?
- Do you talk to your friends about the events in your community?

**Do you identify as a citizen? Of what? Why do you identify as a part of this community?**

- Is that what citizenship means to you?
- Why is this how you think about citizenship? What shaped your definition?
- What does it mean to be a good citizen? A bad citizen?

**When I say the word “civic” what does that mean to you?**

- What kinds of things does it make you think about?

**What do you think about when you hear the term, “civic engagement?”**

**What definition fits best with how you think of the idea?**

- **Definition 1:** “participation in the public sphere through direct experience with online publishing, discourse, debate, co-creation of culture, and collective action”
- **Definition 2:** “any activity aimed at improving one’s community”

**With your definition in mind, what types of actions would qualify as civic engagement?**

- Do you think you are civically engaged?
- Examples?

## **TECHNOLOGY**

**Anything you can do digitally... on your smartphone, laptop, tablet, video game console....**

**What do you use technology for in your life?**

- What do you most like to use technology for?
- You mention that you \_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about that?

**IF SOCIAL MEDIA...**

**Thinking about how you described yourself earlier, how well do you think your social media profiles represent that?**

- What kinds of things do you use social media for?
- When you go on social media, do you post things of your own? WHY?

- Do you look at what other people post?
- Do you comment/start conversations on what other people post?
- Do you do anything else on social media that we haven't already talked about?

**How easy is it for you to get online?**

**POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

**How often do you think about current and political events?**

- Does it come up at home or with friends?
- Are you prompted to think about it on your own?

**Do you follow current and political events?**

- Why do you follow these events? What issues are important to you?
- How do you get your news.?
- What sources do you trust?
- How do you know whether the information is accurate?

**Do you follow news/political sources on social media?**

- Do you re-post what you see on those social media accounts?
- If you do, what happens after that?
- How important is it to you to get news info or political info?
- What puts you off from following those stories?

**Are you ever inspired to take action based on what you see online/hear from someone?**

- What sort of action do you take?
- Why?

**Do you talk to family/friends about what others post online?**

- What are those conversations like?
- Do those conversations take place in person, or via technology?

**Have you ever talked about a heated topic with someone?**

- How would you characterize that conversation?
- What does "civil" mean to you? Uncivil?

**Do you talk about political issues or current events with friends?**

- Why, why not?
- Why do you like to talk about these issues?
- In person, or via technology?
- How do you feel about being able to vote in a few years?

**CONCLUSION**

**In your opinion, has social media changed the way people interact with each other?**

- Has the change been positive or negative?

**What is good/helpful about technology? What are some drawbacks?**

## Appendices | Appendix C

# Phase Two Interview Schedule

### Introduction

*Thank you for coming to chat with me, it's great to be able to talk to you again. I am really interested in following up with you on our conversation a few months ago, to hear what you have to say about your experiences with community, citizenship, and technology. There are no right answers that we're hoping to hear – just tell me what you think.*

*I'm recording the interview so that we can listen to all the different things people have told us later on. But everything you say is private and we certainly won't discuss anything you talk about with people who know you. I also want to mention that you are welcome to stop the interview at any point in time.*

*Do you have any questions for me? Right, let's get started.*

### Citizenship & technology

In our last conversation, you mentioned that to you, citizenship is “**Being involved...being concerned about, you know, legal issues, political issues.**”<sup>9</sup> Tell me about a time in your life when you felt like a citizen. What made you feel like a citizen in this moment?

What are some ways that you like to demonstrate your citizenship, or that you are a citizen? Why?

- if participant says “I don't know”, What are some ways that you think about how to demonstrate your citizenship? Why do those things come to mind?

Can you tell me about how you use technology as a way to show your citizenship?

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<sup>9</sup> Bold text within the interview question indicates where interview answers from the participant's Phase One interview were incorporated into the Phase Two interview for each participant. This bold text was different for each participant, reflecting his or her responses in Phase One.

- if participant says they do not use technology to show citizenship, Why is it that technology is not a way that you like to show your citizenship?

What are some ways that you like to express yourself (in general?) What are some ways that you like to express yourself using technology?

### **Politics, civic identity, & technology**

Tell me about the first time you thought about something political. How old were you? What was the political topic? Who was there?

- if participant cannot think of an example, Did your family ever talk about politics at home? Did your teachers mention politics at school? Tell me the first memory you have of this.

In our first conversation, you mentioned that...

- you're interested in politics. How did your interest begin? Tell me more about that.

What sorts of issues do you care about? How do you learn more about those issues? Do you take action about those issues?

- if participant says, "I don't know"..., For example, people say that gun control, or different aspects of education matter most to them, like the cost of college. What about for you? What matters most to you? Why?

How do you explore your political beliefs?

Thinking about your personal views, how do you like to express yourself on those issues?

- if participant says they don't express, What are the reasons why you do not express yourself on those issues?
- If participant says they don't express because adults don't listen to young people, Why do you feel that way? What might change how you perceive whether people are listening to the expression of your beliefs? What about if you expressed your beliefs to your peers, rather than adults?

When people talk about whether they are a member of a political party, what do you think about for yourself?

- If participant says yes, What has shaped your views or support for this political party?
- if participant doesn't identify with a party, What has helped shape your views as they stand now? Is there any reason why you do not align with a political party or candidate?

What sorts of things come to mind when you hear someone mention the presidential election this year? Why?

Are there any candidates in this election with whom you identify? Why?

- if participant says yes, How did you come to identify with this candidate/these candidates?
- If participant says no, Is there any reason why you don't identify with anyone who is running for president? Is there another political figure with whom you identify more? (*could be past or present, to give participants options to think about... i.e., past US presidents, congress people, activists*)

## **Technology**

Tell me about the first time you used technology. What was the technology? How long ago was it? What was the experience like? Why does this memory stand out?

Tell me about when you first learned about **Facebook or Snapchat**. What made you want to get an account and start using it?

In our first conversation, you mentioned that to **you feel a part of the Jewish communities, the “nerd” communities....** Some people feel that they belong to online communities. What about for you? Please describe your relationship with online communities, or communities that were formed via technology.

- Can you show me what this community is like? Would you like to Screen share?
- Please describe this community.

For you, what does it mean to be an active citizen? What are some ways in which young people could be active citizens?

- if participant believes only adults can be active citizens, Is there any particular reason why a young person cannot be considered an active citizen?
- If participant definition of active citizen includes community service, Do you have to be an adult to do community service?

## **Appendices | Appendix D**

# **Social Media Features and Affordances**

	Facebook (2004)	Twitter (2009)	Tumblr (2007)	Instagram (2010)	Snapchat (2011)
<i>Common Uses</i>	Content sharing ranging from status updates, photographs, and videos, to links to news articles and YouTube video clips.	Sharing content via Tweets and Re-Tweets. Re-Tweet feature “empowers a user to spread information of their choice beyond the reach of the original Tweet’s Followers” (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). This allows the dissemination of information beyond the intended audience, broadening the reach of individual voices. Users can Follow other users, tag their Tweets, or search for other Tweets on a particular topic, by using the hashtag. A hashtag, which is written with a # symbol, is used to “index keywords or topics” on Twitter (Twitter, Inc., 2018).	Sharing original content, including text, images, and videos. Follow other blogs and topics in a similar manner to how it is done on Twitter, using hashtags. Re-blog other users’ posts.	Post edited photographs and videos – with the help of the app’s photograph filter features. Comment on other users’ content.	Photo and video sharing. Texting.
<i>Following and Tagging</i>	Began as a social networking website to connect individuals within a pre-existing social network in the context of their university. Today, Facebook includes features that allow people to connect with each other, brands, and news outlets.	Follow other users (using the @ symbol followed by the user’s identifier) without reciprocity. Users are able to Follow people they know, people in the public eye, brands, and news outlets.	Follow other blogs and topics in a similar manner to how it is done on Twitter, using hashtags (Tumblr, Inc., 2018).	Users are able to Follow people they know, people in the public eye, brands, and news outlets in a similar manner to how it is done on Twitter, using hashtags (Instagram, Inc., 2018).	Friend connections are more intimate, beginning with existing contacts that users have in their smartphone contact list (Snapchat, Inc., 2018).
<i>Unique Features</i>	Anyone aged 13 or over can join Facebook by creating a profile using their real name, not a username like some social networking websites allow (Fordham & Goddard, 2013).	Twitter allows communication in discrete bits, called Tweets, that were previously limited to 140 characters (Hosterman, 2012).	Blog customization with various fonts, colors, layouts, and usernames. Unlike Facebook, Tumblr allows for people to explore identity with their username and maintain an anonymous identity if they wish.	Focus on user-produced photography.	Photos and videos that are shared in individual messages disappear after the recipient views the message. Stories disappear 24 hours after they are posted.
<i>Affordances to young people and potential implications for civic identity formation</i>	The Facebook Group feature allows young people to connect with others who have similar interests. Most commonly, young people belong to Facebook Groups for their sports teams and clubs at school. Groups are often the way that young people find out about their sports match schedule, or club meeting times. The Facebook Events feature allows users to create events, or find out about events happening in their area that they might be interested in. Young people may learn about protests (i.e., a school walkout) through a Facebook Event.	Allows young people to stay connected to their friends, their favorite celebrities and athletes, and current events. Twitter (theoretically) allows users to directly connect to anyone with an account, from their best friend to the President of the United States. Twitter news alerts on smartphones and tablets keep young people informed about political affairs and current events at the international, national, and local level.	Users can maintain an anonymous identity. Some users may take advantage of this anonymity to explore their political opinions and beliefs that they might not feel comfortable sharing with their friends and family, and others who know them, by starting their own blog or following the blogs of others to learn about diverse political opinions.	Young people often take to Instagram to post selfies and share photos from their daily lives. Young people can take to Instagram to share a selfie with a caption indicating a political message (i.e., “Black Lives Matter”), and can learn about current events by Following politicians’ and news outlets’ Instagram pages.	Parents and teachers cannot trace the message (unless the recipient is quick enough to take a screenshot of the message before it disappears), allowing for young people to have a sense of privacy to communicate with their friends. Young people can use Snapchat as a medium to communicate with their friends about current events.

Note: All of these social media websites and apps are starting to borrow features from other apps – such as filters for photographs, and direct messaging features – and becoming more similar to each other over time.

## Appendices | Appendix E

### Participant Descriptions

Name	Age	Gender	Description
Kali	16	Female	Passionate and vocal student, who unabashedly shared her opinions and beliefs. Kali admires her mother, who raised Kali and her siblings as a single parent, and founded a non-profit organization. Kali's younger sister was shot and paralyzed at age 3, and her mother does outreach for victims of violence.
Veronica	15	Female	At first Veronica seemed timid, but as we continued talking, she comfortably revealed her thoughts and beliefs. A hard worker, Veronica skipped a year in school. While she is the youngest in her class, she is often called upon to tutor her classmates and help them succeed academically. Veronica highlighted her youth as an occasional barrier to opportunity.
Madeline	17	Female	A “happy, caring” person, Madeline is very active in her school and her church. Madeline views her social media profiles as a “billboard” of herself, and is careful to present herself online as accurately possible.
Laura	17	Female	Laura is very active in Live Action Role Play, but chooses to keep this passion of hers private and does not tell her school friends because it is “nerdy” and she does not want people to “judge” her. Laura is very involved in her church and often goes on church retreats with her father.
Jackie	16	Female	Very involved in sports and church youth group, of which she is a founding member. Active on social media, and her interest in sports prompts her to Follow sports news outlets.

Hannah	16	Female	Down-to-earth with a funny sense of humor, Hannah enjoyed talking about the funny moments she recently shared with her friends. Hannah described her family as “political” - her father was a Marine, and her uncle was in the Army - and is well-informed as a result of following the news and having discussions about it at the dinner table.
Naomi	16	Female	Energetic, and very interested in talking about politics. Naomi especially enjoys talking about politics with a particular friend who has opposing viewpoints.
Jane	14	Female	A newcomer to the school, Jane is excited to be involved in so many school sport activities. She is soft-spoken and loves drawing, and also enjoys video games.
Mira	15	Female	Mira has a peculiar sense of humor, and frequently inserted her sarcasm to our conversation. Mira’s best friend is her former third grade teacher.
Grace	16	Female	Quiet student originally from China, with interesting comparisons between the idea of community in her homeland of China and her new home in the United States.
Kaitlyn	16	Female	Easygoing and talkative, but does not enjoy talking to her peers about politics. Kaitlyn prefers to not know whether her friends disagree with her point of view, as she is concerned that an argument of opposing viewpoints would terminate the friendship.
Allie	15	Female	Sweet, genuine, and talkative, Allie shared her passion for school, her sports teams, and the fundraisers she participates in for local charities. Allie has been struck by the conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, and often reads news articles and talks to her friends about the issue.
Ava	16	Female	Feels a strong sense of community at her school, and demonstrates her community membership by participating in service activities.
Peter	17	Male	Gregarious and articulate, Peter described that his interests go beyond social media and technology. Due to his phone breaking and his girlfriend falling ill for several months, Peter noticed that he did not miss technology or social media while he focused on the “more important things in life.”
Nora	15	Female	Nora is very shy, and expresses herself through dance. Humble, she did not share her impressive dance accomplishments until much later in the interview.

Aileen	15	Female	Very timid and shy in conversation, but very active on the ice with her hockey team.
Jillian	15	Female	Very talkative and engaged in performing arts. Her mother calls her “spirited.” Jillian was not afraid to share her thoughts, beliefs, and opinions on any subject.
Carly	15	Female	A shy student, active with her sports teams and her church group.
Elsie	17	Female	A self-described “nerd,” Elsie has attended several high schools. She is very interested in having thoughtful and productive conversations with others about political and social issues. Elsie often spends time on Tumblr, posting her thoughts anonymously, and reading the opinions of others.
Maisie	14	Female	Thoughtful, calculated speaker with wisdom beyond her years. Family chooses to not own a car to limit carbon footprint. At the time of our first interview, Maisie had removed herself from social media. 4 months later, during our follow-up interview, Maisie told me she was back on social media.
Joelle	15	Female	Joelle's family has one car, and because her father works on the weekends, she often has difficulty going far beyond her home. While she uses technology and social media to entertain herself, she also follows the Black Lives Matter movement. As an African American, this movement is important to Joelle and her family.
Addie	14	Female	Addie has a bubbly personality, and is very well informed about political and social issues. She is very independent, and is unafraid to lead and guide her friends when they come to her for help. Addie recently decided to spend less time on social media, and finds she appreciates and pays attention to things that she did not notice before.
Imani	14	Female	Imani is attuned to what is happening on social media. She acknowledged that some people use social media as a way to “cause drama.” Imani informed me about what “subbing” is: a public post that is directed at a specific person, without mentioning the name of that specific person.
Aidan	15	Male	Aidan is very involved in his community by doing “extra stuff,” such as community service and academic enrichment activities. School is a central part of Aidan's life, and he believes that our school experiences shape us into who we are. For Aidan, school group projects are situations in which

			young people can exercise their leadership roles and “civic duty.”
Camille	15	Female	Camille is active on social media, but does not believe that people behave the same way online and offline. Camille likes to text her friends to ask them what they think about current events.
Sean	15	Male	Very engaged in school and sports. Sean is very articulate and has carefully thought about many political and social issues.
Nadia	16	Female	Very active member in her community, specifically her citywide youth council. She advocates for the rights and education of the people in her age group, and was eager to discuss the projects with which she is involved.
Zelda	14	Female	A talkative, outgoing girl, Zelda is very active in sports. She considers herself to be better informed about current events than the rest of her family, and used Twitter to follow the presidential debates throughout the election cycle.
Selah	15	Female	Selah is very quiet, but very interested and passionate about her participation on the debate team at school. For Selah, participation on the debate team at school has opened her mind and kept her informed about current events.
Jaden	14	Male	Jaden describes himself as simultaneously “lazy and hardworking.” He is active in online video games, and has met friends through the online game League of Legends.
Kenai	14	Male	Kenai is engaged in online video games, and has met friends through the online gaming system. He is interested in politics, but faces a complicated dynamic at home, in which his mother doesn’t think he is old enough to have a discussion about politics, so deliberately does not include him in those discussions.
Robert	16	Male	Robert is a self-taught musician, and goes out of his way to help people. He has discussed politics and current events with his father, but perceives that his father has the “advantage” in those conversations because he is older.
Kevin	15	Male	While Kevin shows his outward self as funny, easygoing, and optimistic, he described his “dark” side that he keeps to himself (“I don’t want people in the world to feel bad because I feel bad.”). Well-informed about current events.

Habibah	16	Female	Habibah is funny, caring, and dependable. She is the youngest of 8 children, and firmly believes in the Golden Rule to treat others as you wish to be treated.
Damon	14	Male	Damon is “always cracking jokes and making people laugh.” He will follow current events when they are local and may have a direct impact on him.
Bibiana	16	Female	Cheerful, shy, and an immigrant to the United States, Bibiana provided new perspective on the idea of citizenship, and what it means to be a citizen.
Sawyer	15	Male	Very driven, interested in improving his community through service and through civic action. Says he is “not good at current events,” because he does not follow them.
Tanesha	16	Female	Tanesha did not use any adjectives to describe herself, because she doesn’t like to put herself “in a box.” Likes to express herself through her clothing and says she does “not know” who she is yet. Tanesha takes herself off social media at different intervals every few months to stay away from drama and focus on her schoolwork.
Bethany	14	Female	Generous, caring, and introspective. Keeps a journal and enjoys writing down her memories. Describes herself as “sociable” while also enjoying “silence and quiet.”
Martin	15	Male	Strong young man, concerned with how he presents himself to others. Wants to participate in Black Lives Matter movement, but worries for his safety and getting into trouble.
Stephen	14	Male	Plays a lot of video games and hopes to be a video game designer when he grows up. He perceives that he cannot be civically engaged until he reaches age 18.
Joseph	16	Male	A self-described “average high-schooler,” Joseph does not show interest in politics and current events. However, he watches the news and learns about local events through social media.
Sachi	17	Male	Very civically engaged, and a member of a very civically engaged family. Keen to share experience of an 8-day trip during which he met government officials and other young people from all over the country.
Gwen	18	Female	Born in Cameroon and now a nationalized American citizen, Gwen has opposing views of citizenship in comparison with Bibiana.

Carol	17	Female	Outgoing, cares about school. Does not use social media much because she doesn't believe that the number of Facebook Likes one receives should determine one's happiness.
Keegan	18	Male	Only young person who specifically identified with ideals of the Republican Party. Described his viewpoints clearly and thoughtfully, and understood when he shifted his political beliefs.

## Appendices | Appendix F| Participant Vignette

### Elsie

Elsie is a 17-year-old female with unlimited access to Internet. Both of Elsie's parents completed graduate degree. She has very mature thoughts on civil discourse and civic engagement. Elsie is also a good illustration of using social media to have civil discourse.

#### **“Civil discourse is like totally broken down!”**

Before the start of each interview, I thanked young people for their participation and asked if the meeting time was still convenient. I did the same thing when I first talked to Elsie, and was surprised when she answered, “I literally like, told my dad, and he was like, ‘civil discourse is like totally broken down!’ and I was like thinking about what the guest speaker at the One Day Conference had said.” As Raich (2009) notes, occasionally, participants may step outside themselves to “make a connection between the researcher and the research theme” (p. 362). Elsie knew I was interested in the idea of civil discourse (among other things), and sought to make the connection between herself and her family and my research interest.

I first met Elsie at an all-day conference organized by the student-led organization devoted to civic engagement and education that Elsie is a part of. The speaker she referred to, a state government official, discussed the importance of politicians “on both side of the aisle” working together. Elsie is an active participant in this civic-minded organization, and was primed for our first interview by this One Day Conference, and our initial conversation that day when I announced to students at the conference that I would like to learn more about their civic experiences. By the time we had our interview, Elsie may have reflected our first meeting, and remembered that I was interested in the topic of teenagers discussing political and social issues, and she began our interview with the mention of her father's perspective on civil discourse.

Elsie had similar views of citizenship as other students I had talked to from the Catholic school, but reads news from more reputable sources, such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Economist*. For Elsie, citizenship means “being involved. As far as discourse stuff... you know, the main reason Junior Statesman... is, you know, have young people concerned about, you know, legal issues, political issues, that sort of thing.” Elsie used the word “discourse” many times throughout the interview, but I did

not use that word in my questions or probes during the interview. She classified “discourse” and “argument” similarly: they refer to conversations about an issue that include opposing viewpoints, but believes “civil discourse” to be a respectful conversation with the end goal of reaching a conclusion.

Elsie says she is not “particularly patriotic,” but she does “identify as a citizen of my country.” She paused and reflected: “Um... I don’t know? I never... I just never really used that term to describe my membership in the communities that I belong to.” During our first interview, Elsie was “terrified” to vote, because she hadn’t yet chosen a candidate for whom to cast her ballot. Elsie is unafraid to speak her mind to her peers, and she did not hold anything back during our interviews. At the time of our interviews, the primary elections were in full swing. Elsie did not strongly identify with any of the 2016 presidential candidates, and “is kind of indifferent,” but liked “Rand Paul because he’s somewhat libertarian and most likely to decide that gay marriage and abortion are states’ issues.” In Elsie’s words, “Trump is crazy” and “the Republicans got left with all the whack jobs.”

By the time of our second interview, which occurred 6 months after our first interview, Elsie had turned 18 and voted in her first election, the presidential primary. In this moment, when she voted for the first time, she felt like a citizen “making a big decision about the future of this country.” She believed the 2016 Presidential Election to be “bizarre and horrifying at the same time. Um... [laughs]... with both sides becoming progressively more radical. Um... and it feels as though we’re sort of on the cusp of something really big with this election.” Elsie also felt like a citizen as a part of her school’s inter-faith club, when she advocated with her classmates for a meditation room in the school. The experience “going to various committees, and advocating for it, and it sort of felt like a legal process with lots of bureaucracies to sort through.” This is an example of something that young people can do in their school years to prepare them for what’s to come when they enter adult citizenship.

### **Technology has “always been a part of my life”**

Elsie recalls, “There are like pictures of me as a baby like, holding up like a cell phone like my mom and stuff like that. Just like, always been like, a part of my life.” At present, technology is as much a leisure activity – streaming television shows and movies on Netflix is one of her favorite ways to relax – as it is a way for Elsie to engage with others. Elsie first got a Facebook account because her mother had one. Due to Facebook’s age limitations (users must be 13 years old or older to create an account), Elsie lied about her age and created an account when she was 11. Now, she uses technology to communicate with her friends from previous schools: “in general, technology has been a force for good in my life. Um... I’ve like, stayed in touch with people via um, like for example just recently I found out that my friend who lives in Malaysia is gonna like, come to BU and so I’ll get to see him next year, and I probably would have never found that out, you know, if this happened 10 years ago because I would have lost completely all contact with him. But because of Facebook, like, I saw that post.”

Elsie’s description of her identity intersected with her technology use. At the start of our first interview, I noticed that her Skype name was “Betty,” but when I asked if she had a preference of a name to go by for our interviews, Elsie or Betty, she didn’t have one.

Rather, for Elsie, it seemed like identity was tied to the schools she has gone to. She has been a student at 3 different high schools. At age 17, Elsie would normally be in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but she is repeating her 11<sup>th</sup> grade year to boost her grades before applying to university.

When things didn't work out for her at her previous school, Elsie described having "a weird identity crisis" during which she considered converting religions. Elsie was the first student to deeply reflect on (and perhaps deconstruct) her identity during the course of our conversation. Elsie noted that she feels like she doesn't "have a single identifier... I'm Jewish... I'm a member of the Jewish community." But unlike some others who identify as members of the Jewish community, Elsie is "not one of those people who does Jewish Day School, and everyone I know is Jewish." Elsie is a self-proclaimed "nerd" and likes to "hang out with other people, like the nerdy community."

Elsie also saw herself as a member of communities based online. Elsie was a part of Club Penguin when she was younger, and at the time that she joined, she did not know how to type, and did not communicate with others on the website. However, this online community enabled her to explore avatars and try out different identities. Elsie is no longer involved in online communities in the same way because there are "no more usernames... the username as like a thing and like the crafting of it is no longer like, a valued thing anymore." [Another participant from this after school program also referred to a username as a way to express one's identity.] Today, Elsie really enjoys writing, and is a member of an online community of women writers, a "fellowship that writes about Judaism and feminism." This community hosts webinars once a month, and provides a prompt for a piece for participants to write by the end of each month, and after peer editing, the pieces are published as posts on the website. As this website information is very personal, I did not seek it out as away to protect Elsie's identity.

Elsie is also a member of the Tumblr community, where she enjoys fan fiction. While she has spent a lot of time on Tumblr ("when I was super depressed, I spent like, way too much time on Tumblr and I wouldn't sleep, I would just be doing other things if it was like 50 years ago if Tumblr wasn't a thing in my life"), Elsie critiques Tumblr for not being a place to have discussion. People can post and re-blog items, but it isn't the same. My interviews with Elsie were conducted over Skype, which was helpful because Elsie was willing and able to share her screen with me to show me the sorts of things she looks at on Tumblr, and what she likes to post.

### **Navigating Civil Discourse Online**

Elsie had a very clear and developed understanding of civil discourse. For her, civil discourse is "a discussion between two people, and they try to reach a conclusion. And like, both sides make concessions along the way, that sort of thing. Whereas like, uncivil discourse is just both sides are yelling at each other, their own rhetoric. I remember someone was talking about arguing online. And they said that your opponent is going to feel as though every time they say something, it's the thing they say before they slam the door and walk out. So you need to keep arguing with them."

For Elsie, citizenship is "sort of something larger than myself that it's... gonna outlast me" and can be demonstrated through "having discourse about recent political issues and such. And the past Junior Statesman conference was incredibly disappointing in that I didn't really get that much discourse. um... so I just feel like it sort of ... uh... I wish I

could demonstrate citizenship more so through like, becoming better informed through discourse.”

Elsie demonstrates this idea of discourse and becoming informed through social media and online communities. She has learned “about events in the community through technology. And sometimes I’ll like, re-blog something on Tumblr, or you know, Share something on Facebook that is political and sort of explains opinion.” Elsie’s self-expression online varies by social media platform: on Facebook, she is more private because she doesn’t want her rabbi or former nanny to see what she is up to, but on Tumblr, which she believes is more “anonymous,” she is more open.

Most of the time, Elsie has chosen to keep “political stuff” off of Facebook, and Elsie has also omitted sexual orientation from her Facebook page. She prefers “to be somewhat in control of who knows what about me and my views.” She also wants to avoid receiving “snap judgment” of me based of off her online profile. She is careful about what she posts on her Facebook because “there’s some people that I don’t want to argue with” and “some people I don’t want to offend.” Instead, Elsie prefers to share “funny stories” from her daily life. Reflecting on the “post political” item that Elsie shared to her Facebook page, she told me about a video “about how you shouldn’t sort of buy into ISIS...um, as far as it like, being a representation of Islam, because it’s exactly what ISIS wants.”

Elsie believes that civic duty includes having “opinions about political matters and voice the opinions.” At the time of the interviews, Elsie did not consider herself to be an active citizen, or someone who is “informed and involved” because she is still forming her own views and is not engaged in discourse as much as she wants to be, because she doesn’t want to find “random” people on the Internet to discuss these viewpoints.

Interestingly, Elsie did not refer to voting as an active citizen activity, even though Elsie is now 18 and can vote, and recalled voting for the first time as her memory of feeling like a citizen.

Elsie genuinely wants to learn about “the other side” and “understand where they’re coming from.” She prefers to have these conversations, this discourse, in person, rather than reading about these opposing viewpoints online. On the Internet “it’s hard to tell which people are serious, and which people are trolling. And um... I’ve found when it’s with people you can sort of, understand more so where they’re coming from.” Elsie tries to “stay out of stuff on Tumblr, because like, no matter what you say, you’re probably wrong.” I asked what she meant by this, and Elsie clarified to say that sometimes Tumblr users scold each other for their beliefs if they are not from the community that they are discussing. Elsie described when someone called her out for blogging about Caitlyn Jenner’s commentary on misogyny in society. She was told, “you should stay in your lane, you’re not trans.” More often than not, Elsie says, “online, I’m always worried about what I say is going to get misinterpreted.”

### **Civic Identity Over Time**

Elsie’s first political memory is in 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when her friend had an Obama pin on her backpack, but she didn’t become truly interested in politics in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. At that point, Elsie recalls being a “Libertarian Republican because that was what my father was... um... and like, I ... remember in my eighth grade social studies class, we

used to have these like, current events quizzes. And apparently, as soon as I raised my hand like, to have discussions about it, like everyone else would close their books because they knew it was about to be a long... [laughs]... thing of me arguing with other students. Um... especially because I was one of the only conservatives in my grade.”

Elsie described her transformation from listening to her father to developing her own views: “I basically just listened to my father, and whatever he said I just sort of agreed with. Like “global warming isn’t real,” which just... it is [emphasis original] real. 97 percent of the scientific community believes it, so how can this... be a thing. And I wouldn’t... I wouldn’t do research, I would just listen to my dad, and agree with him, and I’d go to school and argue with kids about it. um... the thing is the kids I went to school with were also just listening to their parents and not doing a whole lot of research ... it was pretty easy for me to argue with them a lot of the time. Um... like, I ... yeah. People make really stupid arguments and not understand.” It frustrates Elsie when her peers do not conduct research to support their points of view, and Elsie reflected on a conversation she had with her now-boyfriend that demonstrated to her that *she* needed to do more research: “He was like, ‘why do you think this? This doesn’t make any sense! Here’s some points of evidence!’ and I just didn’t have counter evidence, and I was like, ‘okay, maybe my point of view is wrong,’ but it took a lot of arguing to get there. Um... and so sort of explored my political views through that and sort of just... arguing with people and seeing what they have to say.”

Today, Elsie describes her political views as “left-wing Libertarian” because she believes that “government involvement leads to it being bureaucratic and poorly-run.” Elsie believes that gay marriage and abortion are two examples of issues that the government should not “be a part of.” For Elsie, “the government shouldn’t say who you can and cannot marry beyond like, protecting children from being sold into sex slavery, stuff like that. Um, there’s no reason for the government to be like, ‘well, you can’t marry someone who’s like this.’ Like, ‘No.’ And you know, abortion should be a decision between a woman and her doctor, and the government shouldn’t be involved.”

Elsie also read the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) website at a young age and believes that the government is tracking everyone. Privacy is just one of many issues that Elsie cares about. Her mother studied Women’s Studies in university, so Elsie “always had a feminist thing” in her life, and she also cares about access to abortion. She reads about these issues online to learn more. She also enjoys “listening to passionate people talk about political issues. So they’re passionate about um... It’s... the best way to learn about them. Especially if they’re not radical.”

Elsie used to be more “conservative,” like her father. She agreed with everything he said, but in high school, she started “arguing with people” and began learning more about her own beliefs. Elsie likes to “find grey areas to argue about” and genuinely wants to understand different viewpoints. She complained that when others ask her about her views, they do not share theirs. Elsie blames this on the fact that she goes “to a liberal school that doesn’t really train people to have discourse.” Rather, Elsie seizes any and every opportunity to “have discourse” with others. Not long before our first interview, Elsie regaled the tale of a debate that she had with a classmate during a fire drill. She talked to a classmate about Junior Statesmen and “how I was going to probably argue about the Pledge of Allegiance coming up. And so we started, like,

discussing the Pledge of Allegiance, arguing about it. It was really interesting. Because he was making a pro-nationalist argument, and I was like, ‘but nationalism is bad!’ and he’s like, ‘well sometimes it’s good,’ and I’m like, ‘yeah, but also sometimes it’s bad!’” Elsie laughed as she reflected upon this conversation.

For someone who appreciates learning the arguments of those with differing opinions, it frustrates Elsie that she is mostly surrounded by people who agree with her. For example, no one in Elsie’s family is pro-life, so her pro-choice stance on abortion isn’t challenged. Elsie reflected on this issue and others. Certain events or issues “anger” her, and she feels “this is an issue in our community and we should do something about it. But I find a lot of the time that there aren’t things I can do about the problem.” The perceived lack of efficacy was common among participants. Elsie specified that she is concerned about Islamophobia in her synagogue youth group: “It’s one of those things when I feel like I should say something, but I don’t know how to say something.”

Elsie acknowledged that environment forms individuals and identities, and “education informs a lot of your prejudices.” It upsets her when she discovers people from her community – from a similar educational and socioeconomic background – have “all these prejudices.” She seems more understanding of prejudice from a community unlike her own. For Elsie, she is “a little less fazed by absurd things” that strangers might say online. However, “if it’s someone I know, and if it’s someone, for example, I go to school with, and so they have the same educational background as me, I’m a little more, like... ‘Okay, what’s your problem? Because you should know better.’” For example, “you could be arguing online with someone who’s stopped going to school in the eighth grade, is from the deep, deep south, and of course, you know, they have white supremacist views, they joined the KKK when they were 17 because that was their community, that’s what kept them going. So it’s like, well, they need to get educated, but they’re a lot less likely to listen to you, and ... you know, it’s just a very different experience where, like... if it’s someone I know, it’s someone who should know better.”

Elsie also contemplated her cultural background and its influence on her beliefs. As Elsie has gotten older, she has realized that some of the pro-Israel views she learned in Hebrew school have more nuances than she first knew about. After Elsie “started reading about it,” she realized, “this has a little more nuance than people are telling me to think it has.”

### **Conclusion**

As Elsie has grown up, she has recognized for herself why it is important to have civil discourse, and what platforms are better to have such discourse. She reflected on her family, education, and cultural background, and how her identity and beliefs were shaped by those factors. Elsie decided for herself that for her to shape her views and become informed, it is necessary to “have discourse” with people whose views differ from her own, and to have those conversations in person. Some tensions to be investigated include why Elsie uses “civil discourse” – it could be because of the large role that her father plays in her political identity. Because her father uses the term, so does Elsie. Furthermore, Elsie seemed eager to express her own views, but was less interested in learning about views of “people who should know better.” Elsie preaches that she wants to hear diverse perspectives, but how open to new ideas is she really?

# Appendices | Appendix G | Participant Vignette

## Maisie

Maisie is a 14-year-old white female student at a large public high school. She has unlimited access to Internet. Her mother completed an undergraduate degree, and her father completed graduate degree.

### Technology and Social Media

What stood out to Maisie the most were her experiences with the radio, and when her parents got cell phones. Maisie got a flip phone when she was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and has been exposed to other technology through friends, school, and her local library since then. She has said that she “values the time when technology wasn’t as advanced, I would actually play with things” and notes that now, young kids are playing with iPhones.

Maisie first opened a Facebook account for practical reasons: at her school, sports teams and student clubs utilize Facebook as a way to spread the word about sports training sessions, school-wide events. As of the first time we met, Maisie no longer had an Instagram account or post on social media, because she views it as “too pretend.” Maisie had observed that her friends were going to parties or events for the sake of capturing the perfect Instagram photo, rather than for enjoying the event itself. There is a “culture of complimenting people on their photos,” which yields a “pressure to say certain things about somebody” and adds stress to relationships. Maisie wondered about this complex avenue of communication and compliments, “what does this mean if I say this [in a text]? What does it mean if I don’t respond?”

She reactivated her Instagram account a few months prior to our second conversation because “it’s fun,” and she can still enjoy it while being consciously aware that Instagram is not a full representation of a person’s life. For Maisie, social media is “another layer of the relationship” that she has with her friends offline. She occasionally posts photos, a form of self-expression that is “not deep” compared to her “deep” self-expression through dancing, writing, or conversations with her mother.

## Political Memory

Maisie's first memory of politics centers on the 2008 Presidential Election, when Maisie was six years old. Her family "wasn't really involved," before 2008. On the morning after the election, her mom gave her an envelope with the election result inside, which Maisie looks back on as being "fun." Maisie's interest in politics stemmed from Obama's election in 2008. She bought the TIME Magazine issue that featured Obama, and started talking more with her parents and older brother about politics, conducting more and more research as she grows up. Maisie stands by her belief that she and her brother are more adaptable, and can change their opinions based on what they are learning by following current events, whereas her parents are set in their ways. While Maisie does consult her family about political issues, she chooses to not talk to her friends about current events, because she perceives that her friends do not pay as much attention to the news as she does.

## Citizenship and Efficacy

Maisie considers herself a citizen of the United States, and of her city, because "basically, because I was born here. And... by law that means that I am a US citizen. That's basically it." She observes that "If you're born here, that's like, automatic citizenship, but that's not the only way to get citizenship. You can move here from another country. And get citizenship... and the process is kind of crazy. I don't like the process... I think the idea of citizenship is practical, but also kind of exclusive. Like... it's practical to know how many people are living in a country, and who they are, so that you can help them and do what they need you to do for them. But... it's also like, this whole, like, pride and like, exclusion comes with that, because then... you take like, the label of citizen and people put all kinds of meanings into it that target other people who aren't citizens, and all of this controversy. So I think, like, it has its... things about it, that are bad and good." Her criticism of citizenship as a legal status was shaped by her own family history: generations ago, her family were immigrants to the United States. Her acknowledgement of the United States as a nation formed of immigrants demands respect for those who are currently immigrating to the country: "even if you move here now, you deserve the same amount of respect as those who were here before you."

According to Maisie, an active citizen is a person who uses "all your rights. Like, voting, I think is really important in the U.S. where that's a right... I don't think you unnecessarily have to like, be a like, active with other people to be an active citizen, because I think there are people who live in rural areas and it's just like their family and that's it, and I wouldn't say that's any less active than like, living in a city but not doing anything. I think being an active citizen is just like, being a citizen. [laughs]. Um... and then from there, uh... like voting and participating in just like, even local things. Of like, community meetings, or like, looking out for your community, like your neighborhood."

When it comes to taking action – being politically and socially active – Maisie has been "kind of supporting causes but not rising to action." She explains that she will contemplate when things are "not right... unjust [sic]" but doesn't always know what to do about it, whether she did "anything, if that would actually do anything." She has noticed, "with all the protests going on based on what's going on in the news, I look at it and say, well, you know, all that really does... I mean, most of the time, not all of the

time, but sometimes protesting only gets you a cleared conscience of, ‘I went and did this thing, I feel good about it, I stood up for a cause, yay me.’ And then like, nothing happened because of that protest. It’s just like, life goes back to normal.” While Maisie spoke about large-scale protests, she indicated that for her to feel inspired to take action, it would have to be “on a smaller scale, like maybe an issue in the school or an issue in [city], I would feel like I have more access to the problem, and I could understand it better. And actually, when there’s problems going on that are far away, I don’t know if I have all of the details, I don’t know the whole story, so I feel like I can’t act on it in the best way. But if I know the whole story because I’m close to it, then I think I would have more incentive to actually do something.” Perceived “closeness” to the problem is key for Maisie to feel like she is making an impact.

On age, Maisie notes that to vote, you have to be 18, but there are other ways to be involved, such as the citywide student council in Maisie’s city. Unfortunately, Maisie has not had success in the things she has tried to change, or the issues for which she has tried to make her voice heard, and is skeptical that adults truly listen to the youth council. Maisie notes, “the younger you are, the less respect you get for your opinions and engagement. There’s always something keeping you from being respected, but I’ll always have to be as confident as possible.” Maisie participated in the Mayor’s Program, which is designed for teenagers to work in the fall, spring, and summer at local businesses. This initiative was a way for the city to be more inclusive of its young citizen population. Furthermore, this city allows young people age 12 and over to participate in the vote on the city budget. Maisie believes that young people “should have a say in it” because of the programming the city does for young people. While Maisie participated in the budget vote, she doesn’t consider herself to be civically engaged because she doesn’t attend political meetings.

Interestingly, for Maisie, while she doesn’t feel like a civically engaged person, she does consider herself a citizen. Maisie spoke about her experience of feeling like a citizen when traveling abroad. “Being there and being looked at as like, Other... And then returning home and having that feeling, being home, that made me feel like I was a citizen, like I live here.... It... reinforced the feeling. Because every day you don’t really think about where you live, and how it affects you. But then seeing a place that’s so different and then coming back here.... made me feel like a citizen.” Maisie demonstrates this citizenship by talking to her family and forming her own opinions: “I can’t vote... I can’t *do* but I can *learn*.” To this end, Maisie uses technology to show her citizenship by listening to NPR, watching YouTube videos, and reading articles online about the issues that matter to her.

## **Civic Identity**

### *Community*

Maisie says, “I guess you could say that I’m a part of the [city] community,” but it isn’t “cohesive.” As a first year student in her high school, Maisie hasn’t really settled into her school community. She feels that she might feel more a part of the school if people could find more things in common. Ergo, she feels more of an association with her family.

### *Issues and Engagement*

Maisie and her family care about environmental issues, enough that her family doesn't own a car, which is "our own little contribution for the environment." Maisie also spoke to her interest in human rights issues of race and gender equality, and reads about these issues online: "I like the idea of having a more fair system. I don't know really what that entails, but just like, equality is really important to me. Um... and making sure that everybody gets opportunities for everything, and it's not just like, rigged." Maisie educates herself and speaks up in daily interactions, and does not shy away from her convictions. "I am not afraid to call myself something," she says. "I would definitely call myself a feminist." Online, Maisie follows political and social justice social media accounts to become more aware of these issues that matter to her. Moreover, Maisie listens to the National Public Radio (NPR) service, and reads *The New York Times*. For her, being "knowledgeable" is important so she can "live life in a way that reflects what's going on."

Maisie ponders the idea of civic engagement. While she understands that civics involves "the city, the government, or the community," she notes that civic engagement "isn't always positive. You can have people who are actively trying to tear down the government, for like... protesting everything. And that's still interaction from the people, even though... I mean that's trying to improve their area... but... it's still interaction."

### *Exploration of Beliefs*

To explore her political beliefs, Maisie likes "testing them, playing devil's advocate in my mind. And some things, like, I don't even know how I stand on them because it's just like... I dunno, you know? So I have to keep like, kind of debating myself and debating others." Maisie's development of her beliefs through discourse with others resonates with Elisabeth, a 17-year-old student at a private high school a few towns away.

With the 2016 Presidential Election not 6 months ahead, Maisie thinks about the candidates, and likes and identifies with Bernie Sanders the best because "he has formed new opinions for me... made me think about stuff I wasn't sure about." Maisie understands that the development of civic identity is a process, and that "As I get older, I'll realize I identify more or less with Bernie Sanders." Reflecting on political party membership, Maisie notes that her family are Democrats and that she was raised in a liberal environment. The current Democratic Party, however, "isn't *my* kind of Democrat... I would register as an Independent."

### **Maisie's Call for Civic Education**

At the end of our final interview, Maisie made a point to say that teenagers must be taken more seriously, and that in order to do so, schools must treat young people as citizens-in-waiting, and equip them with the tools they need to be successful and contributing citizens:

"I think that kids and teenagers and young adults are overlooked in the political process, and just in any kind of making change committee in anywhere. I think that kids aren't expected to know about these things, so they're never taught about them. And then it's like this endless loop, because then if you don't teach them, then you can't expect them to know it, but then if you don't expect them to know it, then you're never gonna teach them. So I think that a lot of kids don't

know anything about how our government works, or about politics in general. Um, or like, know anything about this presidential election. Like, I am really grateful for how my family... has like, been very open with me, educating me. But not everybody gets that kind of education. so I think that in schools, it should be more taught of just the basics, of just like, how taxes work, how voting works, or how you register. Things you're not expected to know, but at the same time, you kind of are, or you're expected to figure it out by yourself because nobody ever teaches you that stuff unless it's like your family or friends. Um... and I think if we did teach kids more stuff, and we expected them to know it, then more people would know it. And people would grow up to be more active citizens and more responsible citizens. Um...and then you could like, have real conversations with kids about their opinions on stuff, and educate them further and like, hear what they have to say. Because I think a lot of kids have good ideas about stuff, but um... they just don't really have a voice in anything."

### **Conclusion**

Maisie's concept of low self-efficacy was not uncommon among other participants. Maisie described the desire for young people to be heard and taken seriously. At the end of our second conversation, she made a strong argument for civic education, but I am not sure whether she raised that topic because it is so relevant to my work, or because she thought of it on her own.

Maisie appears to represent others in her same demographic: white, female, middle-upper class. She is definitely more articulate and mature in her way of speaking and her thought processes compared to her peers from the the Catholic school subject pool.

## Appendices | Appendix H| Participant Vignette

### Sachi

Sachi is a 17-year-old multiracial male at a large public high school. Sachi was born in India and was adopted by a Brazilian-American family. He turned 18 before the 2016 Presidential Election, and was eligible to vote.

According to my field notes, the very first conversation I had with Sachi was “fantastic and illuminating!” What stood out to me was Sachi’s honesty and genuine thoughtfulness with how he shared his personal story. Sachi’s civic engagement experience is more traditional (he has met with political leaders, his parents protested the closure of his elementary school), and his case is a good example of how parents might influence one’s thoughts about how to be civically engaged/ what civic engagement looks like.

#### **Identity**

Sachi was one of a few participants who mentioned their place of birth and school as the first thing they told me about themselves: “I was born in India, but came to the U.S. when I was 8 months. I was adopted. Um... I was... I’ve been raised here since I was little. And ... really... Boston is my true home. I’ve been to many different schools when I was little, but I’ve stuck with one high school.” Sachi doesn’t often think about how to describe himself. He said that the after school program through which I met him has been a large part of his life for the past 5 years, and helped him learn about his community and figure out who he is as a person. Sachi says that his experience in his after school program community has helped him “become a better person.” Sachi also attributes who he is to his family and friends, and his morals.

It is important to Sachi to be involved in his community. Involvement “shows that you care that you will ... that you can spread what ... what was taught to yourself, to people who are younger to you. To... sort of modernize... an environment, by still bringing what other people taught you at the same time.” Sachi used an analogy of how sporting games, like basketball, have changed over time with different styles of playing: “in the old days it was just pounding the ball and giving it to the Center. Now, it’s like, 3-point shooting, or... so it’s just... But... then there’s still some teams who go inside, like the Spurs. So it’s just... modernizing and also just showing what you were learned.” I was intrigued by this analogy, how one must take what they are taught and add a piece of themselves to a new lesson for others.

## **Citizenship and Community**

For Sachi, it seems that citizenship and community are intertwined. Sachi describes community as “one in which everyone has different ideals, but can come together and enjoy each others’ presence.”

Sachi says that he is a member of his school, family, his after school program, and the Urban Squash Citizenship Tour because in these communities people are “themselves” and “willing to help someone if someone needs it, or ... and not always asking for someone to go do something for them, or to go out and get something that they can’t get. But... to like, push each other so that they can be at their best.”

For Sachi, citizenship means “being willing to help your community and make a difference for it. Like, cleaning the park will help your community because you’re making the park nicer to go and visit. Or, you’re... helping a candidate campaign for city council or something. So... you go door-knocking. So those are like, a couple of ... um, ways you can help be a citizen.” Sachi described the Citizenship Tour, an 8-day trip for selected urban squash participants, where they meet government officials and others who have contributed significantly to their respective communities. This experience “helped me really find the true meaning of citizenship” because he was able to learn different viewpoints from his peers, and from public officials, in different cities from around the country: “some views may be the same, some may be different, but we’re still humans. That’s what makes our world so unique.”

Sachi believes he is a citizen of the USA, and of Boston, where he has “lived forever” and “proud” to live there. Sachi demonstrates citizenship by “being consistently active in my community. Like consistently giving input to what I think are key issues.” Sachi’s sense of efficacy seems greater compared to his peers. He will speak his mind and “say what I think about a situation, or something that’s going on today. Like, in the news.” For Sachi, an active citizen is one who helps out and volunteers. Sachi says that young people can be active citizens by cleaning up the parks, and doing the right thing, even if no one sees you do it. Civic engagement is very much about serving the community “even if you disagree.” Sachi felt like a citizen the day before our second interview, when he played with children at a homeless shelter, because it felt good knowing he could make someone smile.

Sachi deeply cares about the wellbeing of his community; but where did this personal drive for civic engagement come from? When Sachi was 6 or 7 years old, he participated in rallies and protests with his parents to try to keep his elementary school from closing: “We’d go and camp in the square at night just to show that we wanted it open. All the rallies and like, people coming together... I think that showed a lot of strength.” As a result, he says he is the type of person who will fight for what he believes in. Sachi’s interest in politics began through participating in these types of rallies. His mother is a political science teacher, and he loves history. Sachi explains that his mother “helped me guide my path.”

Sachi mentioned another concern of his related to school, and shed light on the budget cut situation happening in his public school district at the time of our interviews. He described his friends and peers walking out of school in protest, and said that he tried to stay out of that protest because he thinks his peers should have stayed after school,

rather than walking out. Sachi has a “good sense of what’s going on, and I think what needs to be done is that the students need to be addressed personally by people who understand what’s going on. They have to know that walking out does not show that you’re ... that you value your education. It shows that you’re more than willing to skip school every single day. Um... so I think ... and instead of doing a walkout, staying after school, after the school is supposed to be closed at like, say 2 o’clock, staying *after* [emphasis original], because that is legally trespassing property, so I’d say that’s more of what you should do to show that you care about your education.”

As Sachi described his own actions, he believes that actions to show civic engagement include going to a protest, helping strangers, being a “good Samaritan.” Sachi himself considered himself to be civically engaged when he was younger and had more time, but now he tries to get involved in church and his after school program.

### **Online Engagement**

Sachi follows politics and current events, particularly the 2016 Presidential Election, and the Panama Papers release, which was a developing story at the time of our interview.

Sachi looks to “trustworthy sources” like *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Daily Beast*, *NPR*, and Twitter for his news, and TED Talks to learn more. At the moment, Sachi does not have time to read more than the headlines. Sachi believes it is important to be informed about current events because “it shows that people trust each other... and that we can create a community, even if we have different beliefs.” For Sachi, following the news is important because of his eligibility to vote in the 2016 election. It is “good to see how absurd it’s become.” I asked Sachi a bit more about his thoughts on the 2016 Presidential Election. He said that when he thinks about it, he thinks of the “chaos” and unrealistic ideas such as the wall on the border to Mexico that Donald Trump proposed, and free college that Bernie Sanders proposed.

Sachi identifies as an “Obama or Hillary Clinton-style Democrat,” because of his beliefs and values surrounding gun laws and education. Sachi most identifies with Hillary Clinton because she has similar ideals and she is “willing to move in the middle” and compromise. He told me that his parents influenced his identity, and his friends help him learn different perspectives. He cites his own morals and values as helpful factors in influencing who he is. Sachi expresses himself through his actions, and says he doesn’t express himself using technology. Sachi revised the adage, “actions is louder than words and what you think.”

Sachi does not have time to take action based on seeing things online, but he is excited to vote in November 2016 because voting is a form of civic engagement, a way to show others that he is “engaged, and understand what’s happening.” Sachi’s sense of efficacy might be greater relative to his peers because he has this sense of excitement to vote.

Sachi Follows political figures and the news on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram because it helps him to get perspective, and helps him learn who is advocating for certain policies, and how to understand the issues. He also says that the act of Following a political figure on social media lets the world know about *his* political identity as a Democrat, because the figures he Follows share the same views as he does. Sachi first

learned about Facebook in seventh grade, and first got it to keep in touch with friends and family in Brazil. Sachi got Snapchat and Instagram accounts in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade because he “knew it was going to be big” and would further enable him to keep in touch with friends and family. Right now, in addition to Following political figures, Sachi uses Twitter and Facebook to follow sports news, Snapchat to “see what people are doing” and Instagram to keep up with his friends in Brazil. Sachi explains that his profile is “80 percent me” because “you’re never really who you are online, as they say.”

When Sachi uses his computer, he sometimes reflects on learning how to type – his first engagement with technology. Since the time he learned how to type at 8 years old, he has recognized how much technology has changed and how his younger sister relies more on the computer than he did when he was her age. Sachi speculates that now younger people might not know what it is like to do things without technology. While Sachi went on, he made an observation about social media, power, and politics: “social media has developed a power, especially with these last elections.” Sachi speculates that social media will continue to become a powerful tool through which candidates can reach voters with their message.

Sachi will sometimes Share political posts on social media if he agrees with it, but he won’t share his original opinions because he prefers to do so in person because “I think you can see the emotion of the other person better. You can see how much more passionate they are then behind letters on the screen.” Recently, Sachi re-Tweeted a letter that Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren posted. Sachi explores his political views by expressing his own opinion and talking to others, and answering their questions about his views.

He discusses politics with his friends in person, because he likes to learn different perspectives, but acknowledges that his friends have “similar beliefs,” so the conversations do not become heated or controversial. Sachi also discusses politics with his parents. Sachi says that he prefers to talk to “older people because they are wiser and know more.” Sachi is not the only participant who prefers to talk to people who are older.

Sachi’s observation of civil versus uncivil conversations: civil is “you have fun when you talk, and no one is yelling” and uncivil is “the Republican Party... chaos, jabbing at each other, being immature.” Sachi notes that his concept of “uncivil” has been influenced by the 2016 Presidential Election: “2008 and 2012 weren’t this crazy.” Sachi notes that Republicans are “disorganized and rowdy” and doesn’t understand why the Republicans “just jab at each other... but it seems like it works for that candidate.” After Sachi said this, I could not help but wonder to myself, *Do insults “work”? What does it mean for insults to “work”? Are insults and incivility becoming normalized?*

## **Conclusion**

Sachi was a great example of a young person who is very civically engaged, and passionate about giving back to his community. While Sachi talks to his peers about current events, he prefers to talk to adults who are “older and wiser,” which was a common theme among participants. Why do young people not trust each other’s views? Some young people articulated that they are still forming their own views, and therefore

don't want to share them with others. But that does not explain why young people don't want to *hear* the opinions of their peers.

The point that I am most intrigued and interested to investigate is the idea that politicians and political candidates use social media as a tool to acquire votes, and "insults work." Other participants mentioned their view of the 2016 presidential candidates insulting each other as "immature" or "childish," but no participant ever went so far as to say, "it seems like it works for that candidate." This makes me wonder about the potential long-term effects of incivility, and how that could impact how educators teach young people about democracy and civil discourse.

## Appendices | Appendix I | Participant Vignette

### Tanesha

Tanesha is a 16-year-old black female. She has unlimited access to Internet. Her mother completed her undergraduate degree and her father completed high school. Tanesha had interesting thoughts on self-expression/ identity, tech use (she takes herself off of social media for a few weeks at a time to focus on school). Following our second conversation, I wrote, “interview was fantastic! I asked all the right questions to get the info I am curious about.”

#### **“I don’t know who I am”**

Tanesha said, “I don’t know who I am” in our first conversation. Tanesha does not like putting herself “into a box, because if I set a box, then I feel like that’s trying to force myself into it. I don’t like...I feel like I don’t know who I am exactly yet. I’m still growing. I’m only 16. So... I’m still going off of the experience I have, so when I take a chance, I just take it, see where it takes me, find out if I enjoy this, is this me, find out if it’s something I would actually like, is this beneficial.”

Tanesha expresses herself through her clothing. She reflected for a moment and said that “there is a long history of people telling women what they should wear, what they’re supposed to be. So I feel like as a country, having a little bit more liberal, people having their decisions saying in what they want to do. And one thing that I can control at this age, at this moment, is the way I dress.” I asked Tanesha to describe how this treatment of women affects how she dresses now. Tanesha shared a story from that day, when she wore a dress to school that “reached about to my knees,” and she wore sneakers with it. One of her teachers commented that her outfit was “not ladylike,” and told Tanesha she “should be wearing flats, a longer dress with a cardigan.” Tanesha expressed her frustration and disbelief that her teacher would say such a thing: “it’s what I want to wear, it’s what makes me feel comfortable, it’s what I want to wear. So, you’re trying to tell me this is inappropriate for me, but I’m not showing anything... it’s just, me expressing me, me showing my calf.” Tanesha attributed her teacher’s attitude to the idea that “a lot of people from older generations still feel that women shouldn’t have as much freedom as they do now, or they’re not used to the kind of freedom that young girls are getting today.”

Tanesha has been using social media for at least 6 years, and over time has come to realize that each social media application or website represents her in some way. She first got a phone as a 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation gift, and first heard about Facebook at around the same time, and made an account to stay in touch with her 5<sup>th</sup> grade friends. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Tanesha created a new account because she didn't want her new friends at her new school to see the photos of her on her previous Facebook account. As she noted, Tanesha uses each social media app/website for a different purpose, and posts things if she thinks, "the world has to see this." She uses Snapchat for friends, Facebook for family, Tumblr to look at what other people post, Kik to message friends, and Instagram to look at and post photos. This intersection of identity expression and technology use is best described in her words:

I feel like Snapchat represents me very well, because when I use it, it's like... literally a story. It's like, "oh my gosh guys, you wont believe what just happened, I dropped my shoe and I caught it." And it's just like... "what?" that's something I would say. Um, Facebook, I don't really post much. I use it more to talk to family or... yeah, it's usually to talk to family or to like, see... 'cause when certain events happen, like my sister, she's somewhat of a activist you could say. And she's involved in the community. She works at ... with schools and she's all about working for students and getting them involved and everything like that. So when she shares something I like, read everything she posts, I Share it, and get everything out there that she's trying to do for the community.

Tanesha says she "floats around" on Tumblr, depending on her mood. On the day of our second interview, Tanesha said that it was a bad day, which means she would go to music blogs to make her feel better. This interview took place over FaceTime, so unfortunately we did not have screen share as an option, otherwise I would have asked her to show me the Tumblr blogs she looks at. Tanesha doesn't post much on Tumblr because she worries, "if I post something weird, I might lose Followers. So I'm pretty self-conscious on Tumblr."

Tanesha's Instagram use ties directly back into the idea of using usernames to experiment with identity expression. She describes her Instagram account as "a lot of random pictures of randomness. So I think that describes me very well. Especially my name. I use my usernames for like... to describe me. Like, I guess my Instagram name describes how I feel. Because I read about it on the blog that Tanesha, in Buddhism, and the meaning of the name Tanesha in Buddhism gives me a very heartwarming feeling, because I feel like I somewhat connect with that. And then... my Snapchat, Kick, and all of that, is like... is ... pop right out, "hey, it's Tanesha!" and then... um... Facebook is just my name. But it's not my full last name. Because I have two last names. I use just my mom's. Because like, that's my ... name I like to assign with and everything like that." Usernames are a common way to experiment with identity, and Tanesha highlights that depending on the social media application, she uses a different username. After learning about the meaning of her name, she felt more connected to it.

While social media is an integral part of Tanesha's daily life, she takes frequent breaks from social media. At the time of our first interview, Tanesha was on one such break. Tanesha says that she takes breaks from time to time, and that "sometimes it's for concentration reasons. And sometimes it's because people on social media are just...

too much to handle. They're just uh... Very uh... drama-related. Or just... saying things that are not ... harmful to my brain. As I say, 'you're killing my brain cells.'" Tanesha is very aware of the benefits and harms of technology use. Specifically, Tanesha spoke about the concept of addiction to technology: "People are more... it's like a child who is like, cannot get away from their pacifier. That's all they want. When it gets taken away they get sad. It's just ... they don't know how to act, like a temper tantrum...I'm pretty sure 80 percent of the kids in school use their phones. I know for a fact. I'll be in one class, and it's like, "oh, okay, you're texting... you're texting too... okay." Because kids just can't stay without their phones. They don't have anyone to text. They just have to have their phones." Tanesha says people text each other instead of getting together in person, because that is what young people are more comfortable with. Tanesha claims that "people in my generation, they feel more comfortable talking online rather than in person." Tanesha herself prefers to talk in person, and seems to distance herself from her peers by using the word "they" to describe their actions.

### **A place where you are "free to be yourself"**

For Tanesha, community means "a safe place, where you can be free to be yourself. It doesn't necessarily have to be where you live. It could be somewhere where you could be yourself by the people who accept you. And enjoy your presence." Tanesha feels that she belongs to the afterschool program community. She feels safe at her after school program, and while she cares about the neighborhood in which she lives, it is a "known place for like, shootings and crimes and like, domestic violence and drugs. So I can't do much to stop that. I just watch it on the news and I don't know what to say or do because it's been a pretty big problem since before I was born. You can't really change it immediately... you can try to lessen it, but it hasn't been working." Tanesha highlighted this sense of helplessness when she said "we can't change it. We've learned to accept it." This perceived lack of efficacy was apparent throughout each interview, when Tanesha mentioned her involvement in her community but did not identify as a civically engaged person, as will be illustrated later.

Tanesha's Advanced Placement U.S. History class has shaped her view of citizenship. She is "a citizen of... many things...could be different, depends on what group I'm talking about. I mean, people take it in different... tenses. There are some people who say I'm not a citizen. But they could be technically, but they say they're not because they have more pride in their actual homeland country, rather than America itself." At first, I thought Tanesha meant citizenship as pride in one's country. She continued, "if you identify with a place and you feel like it's your home, and that you have every right to bet there, it should be citizenship. Not because you were born in a country or naturalized." In Tanesha's mind, citizenship is for anyone who feels a sense of belonging to a particular place – "it is a mental thing, not a property thing." Despite this view, Tanesha said that she has never had an experience in which she felt like a citizen.

### **Political values**

For Tanesha, an active citizen is a person who strives for a better place where they're a citizen, and "learn more about the world around you. So it's more of what you can do to help the government make better for the rest of the world." One way to show citizenship is to vote, but since "I'm not old enough to vote, so like, I just read up on like, things within politics. Like president... like elections and all that so when it is time, I can like partake in that. And know what my choices should be." Tanesha learns about the world around her now so that she will later be ready to vote. Tanesha has always been

inquisitive about the world around her. Tanesha's first memory of technology use was when she was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. One day, after school, she asked her teacher, "How come Eskimos look sort of like more like they're Asian?" And she was like, 'Google it.' and I was like, 'Google the question?' she goes, 'Yeah.' So I used it, and then from that day I started learning about land bridges between Alaska and Asia, and I got really interested in it. And that's what I learned about Google, when I started Googling random questions that I had about why things were the way they were." Tanesha's mother previously did not allow her to use the computer, but after Tanesha started using the computer to learn more about things that intrigued her, her mother allowed her to use the computer.

Today, Tanesha actively seeks information about politics and current events because she wants to learn how to take it all in, and says there is "no hope" in the 2016 Presidential election. Tanesha prefers to get her news information from print sources, not online, which is unique for this age group. Tanesha talks to friends – but not family, because her family is "never home" – who agree with her political opinions, and sometimes these conversations happen via Snapchat. Throughout the primary election season, which occurred over the course of our interview sessions, Tanesha explained to me that Snapchat had filters to show election results. To learn more about current events and to explore her political beliefs, Tanesha goes to Channel 5, CNN, and Apple News in the morning "just for the political aspect." Throughout the day, she reflects and forms her opinion about what is going on, and then before she goes to bed, she looks at Tumblr to read others' opinions about the current events. Tanesha believes that people should be exposed to more viewpoints so they can be "vocal" which "makes change." Tanesha's mother taught her to speak her mind: "My mom always said, 'a closed mouth doesn't get fed.'"

Tanesha mother seems to have instilled in her the value to speak up for what one believes in. Tanesha is "really big on social issues, especially when it comes to gender discrimination, and like, race discrimination. I like, become involved in those movements. Like, I think my history paper, it's on the civil rights movement. My English research paper was about like, the segregation...the discrimination and racist actions in schools. And I think last year I wrote about the difference between slavery in the U.S. and slavery in like, Africa via Germany. So these issues kinda really interest me because I feel like, ...[inaudible] my ancestors themselves were slaves." She became involved and active on these issues through a Black Lives Matter walk as well. Just as Tanesha expresses herself through dress, she expresses her political beliefs through clothing. She will wear certain color clothes to support certain causes. Additionally, she is a "vocal ally" in the Day of Silence to support her LGBTQ+ friends. Tanesha expressed her opinions about other issues, and ways to deal with them, for example, she disagrees with how her peers did a walkout at school to protest the budget cuts, rather than a sit in.

Tanesha told me that she didn't know what "civic engagement" was, but after I provided her with a few possible definitions, she said it is something that "makes somewhere better for everyone else, the country better for everyone else to live in." For Tanesha, this means "anything that includes incorporating the youth, or elderly, or... just in general, trying to... seeing a problem inside the community you live in, and trying to have it changed and keep pushing towards better." Tanesha serves as an ambassador for her after school program, and is very involved with her community through service projects that the after school program organizes. Tanesha says she hasn't "worked with

other groups, or like, problems in my community as of today. But I work more with the younger people trying to make sure they know what the right path is.” Still, even with these examples of engagement and citizenship according to Tanesha’s definitions, Tanesha does not consider herself to be an active citizen. Tanesha touched on the idea that certain actions are limited to when one is aged 18 or over “I think just helping your community in general. ‘Cause that’s on a lower level, something that can actually be done without having to be a certain age.”

One of the primary activities that one can do on what Tanesha might call a higher level is voting. Tanesha’s beliefs about voting are to another student (SB5), in that she recognizes that the person or issue you vote for doesn’t always win; but "voting makes me feel better. That way I know I put my vote out there, even if it's not gonna change things, it's still... I know what I want.” It is interesting that Tanesha highlights voting as a way she can express her views, even though she is not yet eligible.

### **“Woah, this is big”: Political identity and presidential elections**

The 2008 Presidential Election was Tanesha’s first political memory, because she felt she could relate to it. Tanesha was ten years old at the time, and remembers: “I hadn’t known that he was the first African-American President until my mom told me. So I was just like, ‘What does that mean, is that breaking barrier, or like, cause it's the first time its ever been done.’ So like, the next week or so, I was talking to my cousin about a book about Michelle Obama, and it was like a... kinda biography type thing. So I like, I read it, and I was like, ‘woah, this is big.’” The 2012 election sparked a further interest in politics. That same year was the year of her 8<sup>th</sup> grade civics class, wherein they discussed the 2012 Presidential election, and she realized how much she didn’t want Mitt Romney to win. Over time, Tanesha has become more knowledgeable about the history of the political parties in the United States, and notes that political parties gradually change their views over time, but at the time of our interview she identifies as a Democrat because Democrats care about the community and are willing to help.

Throughout the 2016 Presidential election cycle, Tanesha has thought “meh” when people broach the subject. She does not like how it is a “joke,” wishes the candidates wouldn’t treat it so much like a “contest.” Tanesha expressed her confusion and frustration about why Hillary Clinton and “Trump are trying to argue and trying to attack each other. It should be more about explaining to me, to the citizens of the country, what you are willing to do to help them, rather than trying to attack the other candidate. That’s child-like. That’s childish.”

It makes sense that, as Tanesha does not take the candidates seriously, she does not identify with them. While reflecting on her early memories of technology – and television – Tanesha recalled watching a Martin Luther King, Jr. documentary over and over throughout her childhood. She enjoys learning about 1960s-1970s history, which may explain why she identifies with Lyndon B. Johnson. She identifies with Lyndon B. Johnson because “He did a lot of good work after, like, during the Civil Rights movement. A lot of people give credit to JFK, but like, he was more of a ... uh... media like, scene guy. But he didn’t really get to do as much as he could have before the assassination. But .... Lyndon B. Johnson did a lot of good things, a lot of Acts, a lot of protecting of the [inaudible].... He doesn’t get as much recognition as he should. So... there’s like, good presidents that don’t get enough recognition because also a president before them that like, has a popular vote of the media enjoys him so much that he gets

overcast after his period.” Tanesha views herself as “very underappreciated because I do a lot of good things to help people, and apparently I’m a modest... and I really uh, give credit to other people when it comes to things that I’ve done.”

Tanesha frequently spoke with her friends about the election, because she enjoys learning others’ ideas, but “mostly everyone that I talk with, we all agree. Maybe we agree that it’s mostly gonna be Hillary or someone else. We don’t want Trump. A lot of people want Bernie, but its like, a lot of ideas, no plans. So. I don’t post, I just like talking to people in person.” Tanesha prefers to talk to her friends in person because “people type faster or you can see how they feel. Because they type in all caps where it’s just like... they argue and just like, end it right there. You can go on because that person just said, “wait, but ...” and just like, ‘no, I want Bernie, that’s it.’ It’s like, ‘okay, back off...” Tanesha says that people use technology to “rampage” about issues, and she says she doesn’t have time to do that.

### **Conclusion**

Tanesha is very aware of herself, and how she likes to express herself through her clothing, and her different social media accounts. At age 16, Tanesha perhaps has not yet made the connections between her past (re-watching the Martin Luther King, Jr. documentary) and her present (how she identifies with Lyndon B. Johnson, how she did not realize at first that Barack Obama was the first black President of the United States). While Tanesha did not deeply discuss race as a part of who she is, she did articulate that the issue of race had some importance to her, as she wrote a paper on slavery. Tanesha also contributed a unique perspective on social media – how she uses each account, and how she limits her use when she finds it distracting.

Tanesha’s story briefly touched on the idea of age as a limiting factor in becoming an active citizen. While Tanesha described her involvement in her community, it seemed as though she didn’t fully view herself as a civically engaged person, because she is not yet eligible to vote.

## Appendices | Appendix J| Participant Vignette

### Martin

Martin is a 15-year-old black male student at a public high school. He has unlimited access to Internet. His mother, who completed high school, raised him. Martin had a very thoughtful, purposeful way of thinking. He would often repeat my questions back, to ensure that he understood what I was asking, and that he could give the most appropriate response.

#### **Technology and Social Media**

Martin first created a Facebook account to stay connected with friends, but doesn't often use social media. He described himself as "in hiding" by not using his phone or social media regularly. Upon reactivating his social media accounts and using his phone again, he felt that he had a lot to catch up on, such as events happening in his friend and family groups, as well as re-learning how to use some of his technology.

Martin's first experience with technology was when he went to a store called Game Stop with his mother when he was 5 or 6 years old and got a Spiderman video game. He remembers feeling disappointed because he really wanted the Incredibles game.

#### *Social Media and Power*

Martin is not one to talk about himself, or spread his opinions to others, and rarely posts much of his own content on his Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram accounts. He does note that for many people, social media is a way for people to express themselves, but this freedom can be both good and bad: it can bring people closer together by facilitating communication and breaking barriers between famous people and everyday folk, but it can also lead to people abusing that freedom and using social media to bully or insult others. With freedom on social media, "you can't tell somebody not to do this or that.... They might send out a picture, throw some shade.... You know, they might say something about somebody else, not, like, subliminally. Stuff like that. I think the freedom is a great thing, but I think too many people um, kinda ... I think it's almost like, power where you're humble about it, but after awhile you get power-hungry and you lose yourself and the power, and you lose it completely."

Martin speaks to the way social media gives people a voice – but that voice might not always be spreading positive things.

## **Civic Identity**

### *Identity*

Martin, a humble 15-year-old, had trouble answering my questions about what his likes and interests are – he said that he doesn't really like talking about himself. His mother, grandparents, and uncles taught him morals and to be selfless and to treat others as he would want to be treated.

### *Race*

Martin is cautious to express himself because he doesn't want to seem "I don't want to seem like I'm better than anyone. Um, you know, we're supposed to be created equal." He expresses himself on technology by creating characters like him on video games, such as "NBA, 2K. It's like a series. And you can create your own player. And... basketball, is seen as like, a black sport, but I think it feels kinda cool to create your own character and have them maybe like a likeness of you."

### *Community*

For Martin, community means "cooperation, leadership, another support system." He feels like he is a member of his after school program, as well as the community of people on the street where he lives, because he feels liked, and that people are "interested in what I have to say." To demonstrate his membership within these communities, Martin wears "merchandise" to represent the community, and he feels like how he presents himself by how he acts and speaks is "kinda subtle, but it does make an impact."

### *Issues and Engagement and Efficacy*

#### ***Being a Black Male in America***

Martin first introduced his concern about how others perceive him based on his skin color in our first interview. In our second interview, Martin talked a great deal about police brutality toward people of color in the United States. He shared, "there's a time um, where the crime rate, especially for African Americans, was really big. Um, you know, like the police brutality stuff like that. Like, Missouri, stuff like that. Obviously, I wasn't necessarily nervous ... I don't know if it's because I live up in the North, you know. Um... but I wasn't really like... I mean, I had heard about it and obviously I was disappointed but I wasn't like, you know, I dint want it.. I didn't let it stop me, you know. I didn't want to pout all about it, you know. But it was difficult, because you know, you had different, you know, teenagers dying every week."

Martin went to a "gathering" in downtown Boston, but did not want to get into any altercations. He said he would still care if this was happening to people of another race, but he cares so much because it is *his* race that is most affected by police violence, and he feels "feel a connection, since those are your people." Martin was motivated to attend this gathering because "some people take matters into their own hands instead of maybe waiting it out. I'm one of those people that kind of, you know, not necessarily suffers in silence, but you know, they kind of wait it out, see how it's going to go. Sometimes it's a good thing, sometimes it's a bad thing. If you let it drag out, then you never really... you'll be farther back than you can really get back."

Martin doesn't always speak out against police brutality, and cites two hindering points: "I am underage, so ... it isn't ... I don't think, necessarily that what I would say would

be that big. Um... I am African American, so ... “ Martin sees his race as a black person as a barrier to his efficacy. He prefers to express himself “through my actions, I’d say. I think... actions at times do speak louder than words.... I may not look just like you, but I can still do the type of work you might do, maybe the same or even better. Um... but I don’t really... I know I’m like a big guy. You know, I should probably be outspoken than most. But um... I’m very humble and I try to ... I try to have my actions show um, show who I am, what I am... where I stand for, stuff like that.” Martin reflected deeply on the way he represents others like him, and his actions to combat stereotypes. “I’m kinda talking about like, you know like, the U.S. and like, um, African-American male stuff, like that...how we kinda get bad reps sometimes. What I meant by like, speech and all that is like, you know, a lot of people...not necessarily a lot of people, but people that still have the traditional old ways. They don’t really expect, you know, my type of people to really kinda speak. I dunno. Speak, vocabulary words, rather than slur words together and make slang and stuff like that dialect, so... yeah.” Martin highlighted that his manner of speaking “has a good impact. I feel more confident when I’m talking to anybody. You know, I don’t feel like, nervous, or inferior, stuff like that. Um... yeah. I feel more comfortable with my surroundings.”

### *Exploration of Beliefs*

Martin finds it helpful to talk to others to learn about other beliefs and explore his own. His political party affiliation has changed over time. “At first, you know, I was big on Democrats. Um... but... it’s kinda... it’s kinda difficult because you know, you learn what history has to say about what originally these parties stood for. You know, like Democrats were pro-slavery at the time. The Ku Klux Klan was sent by Republicans against the Democratic Party. And like, nowadays it’s kinda switched. Where Democrats are still, uh, like... it’s still Democratic... like, it’s still.... Uh... like ...people still have a say in things, like Andrew Jackson created that. But it’s like the... the Klan is like for Republicans, and it... I think it switches up a lot, and I think at times I have to go Independent.”

### **Citizenship**

Martin identifies as a U.S. citizen, because “this is like the land I’ve really ever known. I’ve heard about, you know, Africa, and uh, South America. Australia. But I’ve never been there.” For him, it was challenging to think of a way to define citizenship, as he had never really thought about the concept before. Eventually, Martin came to define citizenship as “being a part of a community,” and when he thinks of “community,” he calls to mind the fact that “we have different races. When you think of America, you don’t think of one race, you think of multiple races. Like a mosaic figure.”

While Martin had never heard the term “active citizen” before, and questioned its meaning, he came to the conclusion that an active citizen may be someone “representing their country, really showing their love, affection for themselves and their people.” For Martin, this could also mean “nationalism or patriotism.” For Martin, civic engagement is the same as being an active citizen; civic engagement means “being engaged, like... um... like current events, stuff like that. Being engaged. Knowing what’s going on... hearing what other people have to say,” but, as Maisie also articulated, civic engagement isn’t always “for a good cause. It could be for a bad cause.” The key piece

of Martin's definition is the idea of staying informed and being aware of the world around you as a way to be civically engaged.

Some actions that reflect civic engagement are public speaking, leading rallies, strikes, "fighting for certain rights... like .. egalitarian... Or... some kind of activist." Martin "likes to think" he is civically engaged, but feels, "my ideas are good, but I know other people are always gonna have a better idea. So... I'm not really big on making like, you know, like big... um... civic contributions." At the same time, Martin says he feels like a citizen when he "has a say in things," and voices his opinion. Many of his classmates participated in the two school walkouts to protest budget cuts in the public school district of which Martin is a part. He acknowledged that young people participating in this form of protest demonstrates that young people do care about their education.

Martin will talk to his friends on the bus about political and social issues that matter to him. "When I'm on the bus, it's like a small little clique, if you will, of people that talk [inaudible]. It isn't like, you know, I'm saying everybody's sitting here and I'm giving them my idea. Because everybody's always gonna have a different idea, so I want to respect that." Martin sees value in debating with others, learning what they have to say about certain topics. When he speaks with his friends about current events, he finds those conversations often "cooperative" and "informational" and "mostly civil," in that each of his friends gets a chance to speak and share his or her opinion. Martin also looks to his mother, who he characterizes as "wise," for thoughts to pass on to him and his "generation."

Martin follows the news on occasion, but is very involved with schoolwork and his after school program, and does not have a lot of time to follow everything going on in the news.

### **Political Memory**

Martin's first political memory was in 2005, when he was 4 or 5 years old. He remembers Hurricane Katrina, and a fundraiser where many singers came together. He distinctly remembers that Kanye West, an American rapper, said, "Bush doesn't like black people." That was the first time that Martin heard about the President of the United States, and remembers being nervous about the weather.

Martin's interest in politics began only recently when he "had a thought to talk about it."

### **Conclusion**

Martin's story highlights what it is like to be a young black male in the United States. His identity expression is cautious: he is careful about how he dresses and how he acts, so that others do not get the wrong idea about him.

Martin's comment about social media and power reflects his thoughtfulness and purpose with which he responded to each of my questions throughout the interview. Social media allows people too much freedom sometimes. Some participants take this freedom and use it to their advantage to explore different aspects of themselves, like Tanesha.

## Appendices | Appendix K | Participant Vignette

### Bibiana

Bibiana is a 16 year old Dominican female. She has unlimited access to Internet. Bibiana's mother completed high school, and father completed graduate degree. Bibiana presented interesting views on citizenship and sense of belonging.

#### **Community**

For Bibiana, having something in common with others is an important factor in community membership. For her, community is "where I live. And ... how like, I know most of the people, like, I know my neighbors, and I know like ... like I see them all the time and... yeah." Bibiana thought for another moment and said that community is "kinda like a family, but not really. But like... you're still like, you're kind of like in this like, group of people with like, different backgrounds and stuff. And like, you all have something in common." In order to be involved in one's community, Bibiana says one would have to "know people in your community and like, really have a connection with them."

Bibiana feels like she should be more involved than she is because she is older, in high school. But since she is in high school, that means she is "more busy," and it is "harder to communicate with people around" her. When she thinks of current events, Bibiana thinks about what is happening in her own neighborhood. She recalled a recent time when she arrived home from school, and "the block near my apartment was like barricaded and there was like police and stuff. And then I guess like, some, like, guy was like trying to hold people captive there. And it was like, really dangerous. And I feel like that's what I think of when I hear 'current events,' because like, now, like you would see like, 'oh, there's been a shooting in Dorchester, or Hyde Park has a bunch of roses laid out for people who like, who have died there.'" Bibiana's community talks about these types of current events, these crimes. Bibiana believes it's "really important, because like, it could have been like, someone who you're really close to. And it could have been like... it could have been like, your brother, or your little sister or something like that. And it's always someone else's family member that has been like, hurt." Bibiana's connection to her community, which she described as "like a family," gives her a strong sense of purpose to stay informed about the events that are happening around her.

## **Citizenship**

A turning point in our conversation was our discussion about citizenship. When I first asked Bibiana what citizenship means to her, she said, “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” I asked.

“Well... not really nothing. But like... because I was born in the D.R., so it doesn't... so I know that like, I wasn't like, born a citizen here. So... I guess like, it doesn't really mean anything to me because like, I came here at a really young age. So I know... so I've like... grown up in America. But at the same time, I'm not considered a citizen.” Bibiana highlights the complexity of growing up as an immigrant in the United States. She has spent the majority of her life in the United States, attending school, participating in her community, as her U.S. citizen peers have done. Reflecting on this, Bibiana appeared frustrated. Reconciling how “I can be Americanized and still not be a citizen, or I can know a lot of things about like, the world around me and still not be like, able to vote or something like that” is difficult. The way in which Bibiana thinks of citizenship is complex, and joins the elements of being *born* in the United States and *growing up* in the United States. “You know what I mean? Like, someone who... like, you don't like... when I think of citizen, you don't really... like. Like, *legally* [emphasis original], you wouldn't have to be a citizen. But at the same time, if you like, grew up here and like... you grew up in America and then you just like, have lived here all your life then you're like... technically... you know what I mean? I don't know.” It frustrates Bibiana that while she has lived in the United States nearly as long as her natural-born U.S. citizen peers, and feels “Americanized,” she does not have the same rights and privileges of her peers, who may not even know as much about politics or American society as she does. Bibiana believes that those who are not citizens by birth “would be more inclined to know more about like, politics, and about like, um... people ... about what's happening around the world, because it's like... you want to know more about like, the country... the place you're living in. ...I feel like it's very important to ... know like, what society is. Like, saying ... at the time. Because society's views change constantly.”

For Bibiana, the emphasis on legality, of lawful citizenship, is important. “I guess it's more of like a legal thing. Like a paperwork thing. Um... that's why like, I feel like I think about when I hear the word citizenship. But that's why I feel like it doesn't really mean anything because it's just paperwork.” Yet, when Bibiana describes what it means to be an active citizen, citizenship doesn't reflect legality. Rather, it refers to a person who is “involved in a lot of things ... in regards to what's happening like, around your neighborhood or it can be like, in your overall state. Like, Massachusetts, or it can be like... America as a whole, I guess.” For Bibiana, anyone can be an active citizen. “I think it's different than the legal aspect, because like, I feel like if someone is ... like someone who could be born here wouldn't have as much knowledge as someone, about politics as someone who wasn't born here. And so it's like... it's different because it doesn't... like, someone can be an active citizen but not be like, in the legal state. I don't know. I can't explain it. But I don't think it's like, the paperwork.”

## **Civic Knowledge and Current Events**

While Bibiana told me she had never heard the word “civic,” she deduced that civic engagement includes community involvement, and also believes civic engagement

includes “knowing what’s going on in the world, or in like, your area.” The awareness of current events as a form of civic engagement was a commonly cited idea among participants.

Bibiana follows current events because “the presidential elections are coming up. Or like, they’re happening. And then, um... like... we had budget cuts with our schools and stuff. So I feel like it ranges... I feel like I would know a fair amount of like, budget cuts, and then like... because I was a part of it, because I’m like, a student and that’s like affecting me. But at the same time, I feel like even though I know a lot about that, I wouldn’t know a lot about like, the presidential election because like... like although it’s like... something that I should be engaged in, it’s kind of just off-putting because there’s only like, different opinions... I feel like there’s no... I feel like there’s no one right person to be like, president. We have like... Hillary, and then we have like, Donald Trump, and I feel like all of them... have their bad sides. So... yeah. I don’t really like.... It’s kind of off-putting because like, when you think of like, of some... a president... you would think of someone who like... has a good reputation but like at the same time... people ... like, people don’t have a good reputation often.” Bibiana’s insight about candidates each having flaws is important. She has followed current events to know the positives and negatives of each candidate, yet the candidates have put her off.

Bibiana acquires most of her news information online, following her viewing of a social media post about current events. For example, “I would see like someone screen-shotted a Tweet that like, Donald Trump or like, Hillary Clinton would say. And then, like... I wouldn’t necessarily like, go on their like, profiles, but I would like... Google about more about the information or like, about what they said.” Bibiana is not the only participant who indicated that conducting a Google search after hearing about a news event is a central activity through which young people discover news articles online.

Bibiana doesn’t always talk to her friends about these events, because she feels like her peers are “kind of in the same boat” as she is, and don’t offer “a different view on like, the surroundings.” In contrast, Bibiana feels that talking to “someone who’s actively involved or who actually votes or likes to be involved in politics” is more useful, because they “would be actively involved in trying to like, get more information.” Bibiana describes herself and her friends as those who “observe” things that are going on in the world around them, like “riots,” or what “this person said” through social media.

### **“Social media has made me more aware of societal issues”**

Bibiana used Facebook in “6th grade, and a little bit through 7th grade, and then 8th grade... maybe. And then like, 9th grade I stopped. And 10th grade... it’s... it’s there because... like, I don’t like, delete it, because it’s the people who I kind of like, grew up with, I guess. And so it’s like really interesting to like, see ... not like, people progressing, but just like, the drastic change between what I thought they were and where they are now.” Facebook is a way to keep up with current and former friends. For Bibiana, social media a source of intrigue and information about what is going on in the world.

Bibiana relates her civic engagement to how social media keeps her informed. She asserts, “I would be less involved if I didn’t have social media” and highlights the

power of “people from around the world saying something and like, coming together for a cause.” Bibiana even noted that she would like to “go into journalism” in the future, because a school project enabled her to “interview a lot people, and then like getting their opinions on school life,” which she really enjoyed, partially because she is more aware of certain issues in current events. She feels that “social media has shaped me, like using social media has shaped me to like, become more aware ... Not on like political issues, but more of like, societal issues.”

One issue about which Bibiana is passionate right now is, “Kind of just like how people are like, rude towards like, other groups of people. Like... um.... Like how people would like, experience discrimination against someone who’s like transgender, or someone who’s like, ... or someone who doesn’t really know, like... Like someone who is, transgender or LGBTQ+, and like, their experiences with like, being bullied or like, having those injustices.” Bibiana talks about her anti-discrimination beliefs with her friends, because some of her friends “are LGBTQ+” or have other friends who “have experienced those things,” and also feel passionate about ending discrimination against certain groups of people.

Bibiana discusses this issue and others with her friends, if she or her friends first saw it “on social media.” This group of young people “would talk about how like, something needs to be done about it, and how like, it kind of like, sucks because like, sometimes like, you really want to be involved in something like that. But even if I really can’t... Like I know, for my school, I don’t know if they still have it, but they used to have like, this person used to run the LGBTQ program, and I think she like, left. And so like, now there’s like, a new person, or like... not a new person, but there’s like... people are unsure if the LGBTQ club is still gonna like, go strong. And... like, my teacher was saying how like, it really affected some students, because um... it was a place where they can like, talk, and be, like... be without judgment, I guess.”

### **Conclusion**

Bibiana notes that social media has impacted her consumption of news about societal issues. Technology is very much woven into Bibiana’s daily life. Bibiana’s story brings about some theories about how young people use social media: social media as a way to contribute to a community online, as a way to learn about protest, and as a way to learn about current events.

Bibiana discusses her community similarly to Tanesha by describing shootings and violence.

Bibiana’s idea of citizenship is incredibly complex and nuanced. She has difficulty reconciling the feeling of being Americanized with the fact that she is not a citizen of the United States.

For Bibiana, Martin, Sachi, Tanesha, Elsie, and Maisie, staying informed is a way to be civically engaged.

## **Appendices | Appendix L**

# **CUREC Documentation**

The following form was submitted to and approved by the Higher Degrees Office in March 2015.

Attachments: Documents in Support of CUREC Application

The following documents are included in the pages that follow:

1. Introductory Letter to School Principals
2. Participant Information and Opt-Out Form for Parent/Guardian
3. Consent Forms for Parent or Guardian
4. Participant Information and Opt-Out Form for Student
5. Consent Form for Student

**University of Oxford**  
**CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)**  
**CUREC /1A CHECKLIST FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**

The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure that the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution. They start from the presumption that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research on human subjects is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate. Please check the CUREC website to ensure that you have the correct checklist for your project.

**ONLY TYPE-WRITTEN CHECKLISTS WILL BE ACCEPTED. PLEASE DO NOT SEND HANDWRITTEN CHECKLISTS.**

**ONLY EMAILED APPLICATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. PLEASE DO NOT SEND APPLICATIONS BY POST.**

**What this checklist will not assess**

This checklist does not cover research governance, satisfactory methodology, or compliance with the requirements of publishers when administering their tests or questionnaires. As principal researcher, it is your responsibility to ensure that requirements in these areas are met. CUREC does not review studies classed as \*audit\* (see glossary and Decision Flowchart for CUREC on our website).

The use of an \*asterisked word underlined\* in this checklist indicates a phrase defined in CUREC's glossary. The glossary and further information on the University's research ethics procedures are available from the CUREC website: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/>

What this checklist is designed for

This CUREC /1A checklist is designed largely for research that falls within the Divisions of Social Sciences and Humanities where ethical issues are relatively few and straightforward. Interviews, field work and oral history are also included in the CUREC process.

The full CUREC /2 application is only required where certain project characteristics (eg type of participants, or procedures) result in a more complex set of ethical issues. It is expected that only in a limited number of cases will it be necessary for researchers to complete a CUREC /2 application. The checklist below will direct you to a CUREC /2 application if needed.

**Office use only: IDREC Ref. No. \_\_\_\_\_**

**Date of confirmation that checklist accepted on behalf of IDREC:    //    //**

***Please complete the sections that follow and follow prompts to stop completion and/or submit other documents.***

***Please indicate your answer to all the Yes / No questions with a type-written "X".***

<b>Example:</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>1) <i>By taking part in the research, will participants be at serious risk of</i></b>		<b>X</b>

<b>criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?</b>		
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**SECTION A: filter for CUREC2 application.**

<b>This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues which require the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC /2 application.</b>		
1) Are research participants classed as “*people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question*”? (This may include those under 18 (though see FAQ C12), prisoners or vulnerable adults)	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<i>Note: sometimes participants aged 16-17 are regarded as “competent youths” and may be able to consent for research themselves. Please consult the FAQ C12 on the CUREC website. However, if any of your participants are aged 16 or under, please answer ‘yes’ here and also answer question 4) below.</i>	<b>X</b>	
2) By taking part in the research, will participants be at serious risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
		<b>X</b>
3). Does the research involve the *deception* of participants?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
		<b>X</b>
<b>If you answered NO to all of the questions above please go to SECTION B. If you have answered yes to any question above continue to question 4 below.</b>		
4) Is your project covered by one of our approved research protocol(s)? (see CUREC website)	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
If yes, please give protocol number(s): 25	<b>X</b>	
<b>If you answered Yes to ANY of questions 1-3, and answered No to question 4, please STOP COMPLETING THIS CHECKLIST and do not submit it for ethical review.</b>		
<b>Instead, please complete the CUREC/2 application form, available to download from the CUREC website. Then submit the CUREC/2 for ethical review.</b>		
<b>If you answered Yes to ANY of questions 1-3, and answered yes to question 4, please go on to SECTION B.</b>		

**SECTION B: contact details and project description (NB must be typed not handwritten).**

<b>Contact details</b>	
1) *Principal researcher* / supervisor (if student research):	Dr. Rebecca Eynon
2) Name of student (if student research):	Julianne Viola
3) Degree programme, eg DPhil, BA, MPhil, BSc, MSc (if student research):	DPhil
4) Department or institute name:	Department of Education

5) Address for correspondence (if different from 4):	Linacre College St Cross Road Oxford OX1 3JA
6) University email address and phone contact:	Julianne.viola@linacre.ox.ac.uk
7) Name and status of others taking part in the project. Eg 3 <sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate; post-doctoral research assistant:	

Project description	
8) Title of research project:	Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse
9) List of locations(s) where project will be conducted:	Boston metropolitan area, Massachusetts, USA
10) If your research involves overseas travel or fieldwork, by the time the research starts, will you have completed and returned a travel risk assessment form? (This may be necessary to ensure that the activity is covered by the University's travel insurance – see <a href="http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/finance/insurance/travel/">http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/finance/insurance/travel/</a> )	<b>YES</b> / NO / N/A
11) Anticipated duration of project:	3 years
12) Anticipated start date:	02 / 07 / 2015
13) Anticipated end date:	30 /10/ 2017

14) Title and brief lay description of \*research\* (about 150 words), plus description (about 200 words) of the nature of participants.

*When describing the research, please include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/data will be put. Please also declare any conflicts of interest here.*

*When describing participants, please include criteria for inclusion/exclusion, method of recruitment, and processes (as appropriate) for consent to participate. To support your description please attach documentation such as:*

- recruitment and advertisement material eg a poster or invitation letter
- information for participants to read before they agree to take part eg participant information sheet(s)
- a document to record informed consent eg written consent form(s) or oral consent script in case of an oral consent process
- a guide to interview questions (this may be a list of questions to be asked, or a preliminary scope of questions) or sample of other instruments such as a sample questionnaire
- debriefing document after participants have taken part (if relevant)

*Detailed guidance is found on the CUREC website*

Title and brief lay description of research (150 words)

The title of this study is "Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse." The aim of this study is to investigate how technology and social media influence civil discourse among teenagers, ages 14-17. Through one-on-one in-depth interviews, participants will reflect on their civic identity, social media use, and civic engagement. The researcher will discover reasons for engagement and disengagement, and how technology has influenced the way in which teens talk about civic issues.

Description of participants and obtaining informed consent (200 words)

United States high school students, ages 14-17, who live and go to school in Boston, Massachusetts, and the surrounding urban areas. Participants will be recruited through their schools: the researcher will contact all schools in the Boston metropolitan area, and school administrators will recruit students from their schools. All interested subjects who agree to participate will be included in the research. In accordance with Protocol 25, the recruited students' parents will complete an opt-out form if they do not wish to have their child participate in the study. I will obtain consent from the students before the interview, so students know they can remove themselves from the study at any time. There is a clause in the parent and student information sheets to indicate that interviews are confidential, but if sensitive disclosures about abuse, neglect, or other harm they have experienced arise in the interview, then I am obligated to report that to their school principal or teacher, who are mandated reporters and can take the appropriate course of action with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services. Before the interview begins, I will also verbally remind students of this.

15) What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them?

*Please do not answer "none".*

*The committee wants to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. These issues could relate to your own safety as a researcher, participant burdens/risks, and data protection/confidentiality. For more guidance on ethical issues, please see <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/resources/>.*

A potential ethical issue in this research is that students may share information about and actions of their peers, and these peers may not have given their consent to participate in my study. If such a situation arises, that information will not be included in my research. The Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) guidelines will help inform me to make these decisions.

16) Will you obtain informed consent according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline before participation?	YES	NO
	X	

If you have marked No, please give a brief explanation and justification for this decision here:

17) Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues? This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities.	YES	NO
<i>If you have marked Yes, please make sure that you have included some supporting information (as directed in question 14 of this section) showing the range of questions covering these issues.</i>		X

18) Will you ensure that *personal data* collected directly from participants or via a *third party* is held and processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act?	YES	NO
	X	

19) How will you ensure that any personal or sensitive data are captured, transferred and stored securely?  <i>In particular if data are to be captured electronically, please consult with your local IT department and, with respect to University IT security policies, please comment on how you will capture such data in the first instance, how you will transfer them over networks or via portable media and how and where data will be stored. For more information please see the University's web pages on research data management:</i> <a href="http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/university-of-oxford-policy-on-the-management-of-research-data-and-records/">http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/university-of-oxford-policy-on-the-management-of-research-data-and-records/</a>
Participants in this study will have pseudonyms, and all identifying information will not be included in the final report.

**SECTION C: methods and procedures to be used.**

<b>In this section, please mark X against as many methods or procedures as apply to your research. (This section will help the committee understand the nature of your research and may be used for audit).</b>	
	<b>Please mark "X"</b>
1) Analysis of existing records	

2) Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	
3) Use of casual or local workers eg interpreters	
4) Participant observation	
5) Covert observation	
6) Observation of specific organisational practices	
7) Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	X
8) Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	
9) Using social media	
10) Participant performs paper and pencil task	
11) Participant performs verbal or aural task (eg for linguistic study)	
12) Focus group	
13) Interview	X
14) Audio recording of participant	X
15) Video recording of participant	
16) Photography of participant	
Others (please specify):	

**SECTION D: professional guidelines and training.**

**In this section, please mark X against at least one of the following professional guidelines. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. Note this is not an exhaustive list.**

Research specialism/methodology	Association and guidance document (active links below)	Please mark "X"
Anthropology	<a href="#">Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth</a>	
Criminology	<a href="#">British Society of Criminology: Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology</a>	
Education	<a href="#">British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</a>	X
Geography	<a href="#">Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics</a>	
Geography	<a href="#">Royal Geographical Society: Research Ethics and Code of Practice</a>	
History	<a href="#">Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines</a>	
Law (Socio-Legal)	<a href="#">Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research</a>	

Management	<a href="#">Academy of Management's Professional Code of Ethics</a>	
Political Science	<a href="#">American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science</a>	
Politics	<a href="#">Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct</a>	
Psychology	<a href="#">British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct</a> <a href="#">British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet: (Guidelines for internet-mediated research)</a>	
Social Research	<a href="#">Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines</a>	
Sociology	<a href="#">The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice</a>	
Visual Research	<a href="#">ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research</a>	
Other professional guidelines <b>Please specify the other guideline(s) used here:</b> Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR)		X
Please indicate what training in research ethics the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at <a href="http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/training/">http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/training/</a> ) If no formal training has been received, please indicate any discussions of research methodology between researchers and supervisors here.		
CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) Social & Behavioural Research Investigators Course, through Harvard University Institutional Review Board - 14 June 2013 I have also completed the DPhil ethics training within the Department of Education in this academic year (2014-2015).		

**SECTION E: Signatures.**

**Please ensure this checklist is signed by:**

<i>For staff research:</i>	<i>For student research:</i>
1) <b>*Principal researcher*</b>	1) <b>*Principal researcher*</b> (project supervisor)
2) <b>Head of Department (or nominee)</b>	2) <b>Head of Department (or nominee)</b>
-	3) <b>Student researcher</b>

1) <b>Principal researcher signature / supervisor signature (if student research)</b>
---

I understand my responsibilities as \*principal researcher\* as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC/2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the principal researcher on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

Signed by principal researcher / supervisor: .....

Print name (block capitals) .....

Date .....

**2) Departmental endorsement signature**

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

(i) consider the principal researcher to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;

(ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved protocols, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed (noting the principal researcher's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC/2 full application);

(iii) consider that the principal researcher/supervisor/student researcher is aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research. I am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology is sound; the project has been/will be subject to appropriate \*peer review\*; and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the \*public interest\*.

Signed by Head of Department or nominee: .....

*(example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies / Director of Undergraduate Studies)*

Print name (block capitals) .....

Date: .....

**3) Student signature (if student research)**

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal researcher properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signed by student: .....

Print name (block capitals) .....

Date: .....

**SECTION F: final check before submitting your application.**

	Please mark "X"
Have you completed Sections A-E?	
Have you included copies of any documentation produced with your application?  <b><i>If the appropriate supporting documentation is not included with your application, you will then be asked to provide this separately. This may well delay the ethical review process, and thus the start of your research.</i></b>	
Have you signed as principal researcher and gathered signatures of the student (for student research) and department nominees as appropriate?	
Have you declared conflicts of interest (if any) in Section B question 14?	
Are all pages (including supporting document attachments) numbered?	
Have you defined all technical terms and abbreviations used?	
<p><b><u>How to submit the completed checklist</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>If your department has a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC), submit this checklist and supporting information to the appropriate departmental officer. To see a list of DRECs, go to <a href="http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/about/sshidrec/drecs/">www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/about/sshidrec/drecs/</a></i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>If your department does not have a DREC, submit the checklist and supporting information to the SSH IDREC (email <a href="mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk">ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk</a>). NB applications must be sent by email. Please do not send applications by post.</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b><u>Note on how to send signatures needed in Section E</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>If you have obtained handwritten (wet-ink) signatures, please scan them plus the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email through.</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Alternatively, we accept "electronic signatures" sent as email confirmations from a University of Oxford email address. Separate emails should come from each of the relevant signatories as outlined in Section E, indicating acceptance of the relevant responsibilities.</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b><i>IDRECs and/or CUREC will review a sample of completed checklists and may ask for further details of any project.</i></b></p>	

**The University of Oxford**  
Department of Education  
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY  
Julianne Viola | [julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk)



RE: Student participation in school interview for research

Dear [Principal Name],

My name is Julianne Viola, and I am doctoral student at the Department of Education, University of Oxford. I am studying how teenagers, ages 14-17, use social media and engage in their school and wider communities. I am writing to ask if I could invite students in your school to participate in my doctoral thesis research project in Fall 2015.

Research has demonstrated that technology is a growing part of teenagers' lives. What I hope to find out through this research is how teenagers talk to each other, using technology, about issues that affect their communities. The results from this research will help students, teachers, schools, community groups, and leaders learn about the reasons for engagement and disengagement among this age group, and how technology has influenced teens' dialogue about community issues.

It would be wonderful if I could invite students from your school to be part of this study. If students wish to participate, I would come to your school to conduct one-on-one interviews with them in Fall 2015. Each interview should take about 45-60 minutes to complete. I would be happy to coordinate a timetable for interviews that works best for the schedule at [INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL]. Ideally, it would be very helpful if these interviews could take place during the school day to increase participation across the student population.

In return for collaboration with your school, I will share the results of my study with you when it is complete if useful.

It is important to note two things: first, students' responses will be anonymous – I will not collect their names during the interview process. Interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure that data is collected accurately. Second, students do not have to participate in this study if they do not want to or if their parents do not want them to. In accordance with the ethical guidelines set by the University of Oxford, if your school chooses to participate in this study, we will assume that all students ages 14-17 will participate, unless their parent completes and returns an opt-out form. Furthermore, if a student is participating in the study and the student or their parent changes their mind, the student may drop out at any time and will not be penalized for doing so.

Students will not benefit directly from participating in the study. However, we hope that the study will build students' own awareness about how they engage with technology, their community, and each other, and, in turn, promote awareness about civil discourse within your school.

If your school would like to participate, or if you have any questions, please contact me at [julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk) or at [phone number]. I would be happy to send

along sample interview questions or answer further inquiries about this research process.

Thank you very much for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Best wishes,  
Julianne Viola

**The University of Oxford**  
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Julianne Viola | [julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk)



## **Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**

CUREC approved 27 March 2015

Dear Parent,

My name is Julianne Viola and I am a PhD student at the University of Oxford Department of Education. In partnership with the University of Oxford, your child's school has agreed to take part in a study about how teenagers use social media and engage in their school and wider communities. This exciting research will help students, teachers, community groups, and leaders learn about how young people engage with technology and civic/political issues.

I would like to invite your child to be part of this study. We very much hope that your child would like to take part, but before you decide, it is important that you understand why the study is being done and what it will involve.

### **1. What are we trying to find out?**

This study is looking at how technology and social media influence conversations about community and social issues among teenagers, ages 14-17. We already know that technology is a growing part of teenagers' lives, and that teenagers use technology in different ways. What we don't know is how teenagers talk to each other, using technology, about issues that affect their communities.

Through one-on-one interviews between students and the researcher, this study will investigate how teenagers reflect on their use of different social media and technology and civic engagement. From this study, we hope to learn about the reasons for engagement and disengagement among this age group, and how technology has influenced the way in which teens talk to each other about community issues.

### **2. What will happen if my child takes part in this study?**

If your child would like to participate in the study, he/she will take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will take place at your child's school. Your child will be asked questions about how he/she uses technology, and how he/she is involved in community activities. If your child wishes, he/she may choose to show the researcher what he/she most likes to do online, but there is no obligation for your child to do this.

### **3. Does my child have to participate?**

You and your child may ask questions about the study before deciding whether to participate, and you and your child can choose whether to participate. According to the ethical guidelines set by the University of Oxford, we will assume your consent **unless you complete the *opt-out form*** on the attached page. If your child **does not** wish to

participate in this research, please complete the *opt-out form* and submit to the researcher by **DATE**.

If your child agrees to participate, he/she may withdraw him or herself and his/her data from the study without penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision. There are no penalties from withdrawing from the study.

**4. Are there any potential risks in participating?**

If your child wishes to participate in this study, he/she will not experience any risks other than what is experienced in everyday life. One benefit of participating in the study is that your child will be able to reflect on his or her own engagement with technology and the community, and learn from the reflective experience.

**5. What happens with the results of the study?**

If your child chooses to participate in this study, his/her identity and data will remain anonymous and all information that he/she shares with the researcher will be confidential. However, if your child brings sensitive information about abuse, neglect, or other harm your child has experienced to light, then the researcher would report that to the school principal, who is a mandated reporter and can take the appropriate course of action with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services. The researcher will use pseudonyms, or false names, in the written reports so that the names of the students and their schools cannot be identified. The researcher will be the only person to access the data, which will be stored on a personal, password-protected computer.

**6. Will the research be published?**

If your child agrees to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a doctoral thesis. After the thesis is submitted, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives accessible to all who wish to read it. The thesis may also be used in future conference presentations and journal articles, but in no way or at any time will your child's personal data become available.

**7. Who has reviewed this project?**

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

**8. What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please speak to the researcher, Julianne Viola (Julianne.Viola@education.ox.ac.uk), or Dr Rebecca Eynon (Rebecca.Eynon@oii.ox.ac.uk), who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how she intends to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee** at the University of Oxford (using the contact details here) who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner: Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD.

## 9. What should I do next?

If your child would like to participate in this study, you do not need to do anything else. However, if your child **does not** wish to participate in this research, please complete the ***opt-out form*** and submit to the researcher by **DATE**.

Please remember that you may withdraw at any time, without penalty and without giving a reason by notifying the researcher. If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact: Julianne Viola, PhD student, via email [julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk) or phone [phone number].

Thank you very much!

**The University of Oxford**  
Department of Education  
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY  
Julianne Viola | julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk



## **Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**

### **OPT OUT FORM**

Your child's school has agreed to take part in a study run by Oxford University looking at how teenagers use social media and engage in their school and wider communities. If your child takes part, a researcher would come the school, and do an interview with your child.

If you **DO NOT** want your child to participate in the research, **Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**, please fill out the form below and return it to the school by **[DATE]**. If we do not receive an opt-out form from you, your child may be invited to take part in this study, as described in the accompanying information sheet.

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-----  
**I, the undersigned, hereby DO NOT give permission for my child to take part in the above study.**

Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent/guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Julianne Viola \_\_\_\_\_

**The University of Oxford**  
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 Julianne Viola | julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk



**Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**  
 CUREC approved 27 March 2015  
***Parent/Guardian Consent Form***

The aim of this study is to investigate how technology and social media influence civil discourse among teenagers, ages 14-17. Through one-on-one in-depth interviews, participants will reflect on their civic identity, social media use, and civic engagement. The researcher will discover reasons for engagement and disengagement, and how technology has influenced the way in which teens talk about civic issues.

Please place a check in the appropriate boxes to show that you have read and understood the following information.

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
|  | Check here               |
| 1. I have read the information sheet, have asked questions and received satisfactory answers   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that my child is free to withdraw him/herself or his/her data at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I understand who will have access to the personal data that my child has provided   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I understand how my child's personal data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I understand how research will be written up and published  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I understand how to raise concerns or make a complaint  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I agree for my child to take part in the study.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher: Julianne Viola

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**  
CUREC approved 27 March 2015

Dear Student,

My name is Julianne Viola and I am a PhD student at the University of Oxford Department of Education. In partnership with the University of Oxford, your school has agreed to take part in a study about how teenagers like you use social media and engage in their school and wider communities. This exciting research will help students, teachers, community groups, and leaders learn about how young people engage with technology and civic/political issues. I would like to invite you to be part of this study. I very much hope that you would like to participate, but before you decide, it is important that you understand why the study is being done and what it will involve.

**1. What are we trying to find out?**

This study is looking at how technology and social media influence how you and people your age talk about community and social issues. We already know that technology is a growing part of teenagers' lives, and that teenagers use technology in different ways. What we don't know is how teenagers talk to each other, using technology, about issues that affect their communities. From this study, we hope to learn about the reasons why you want to be involved online and in your community or not. We also hope to learn how technology has influenced the way in which teens talk to each other about community issues.

**2. What will happen if I take part in this study?**

If you would like to participate in the study, you will take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, at your school. You will be asked questions about how you use technology, and how you are involved in community activities. If you wish, you may choose to show the researcher what you most like to do online, but only if you want to.

**3. Do I have to participate?**

You may ask questions about the study before deciding whether to participate, and you can choose whether to participate. According to the ethical guidelines set by the University of Oxford, we will assume your consent **unless your parent already completed the opt-out form** on the next page. If you **do not** wish to participate in this research, please tell the researcher now.

If you agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself and your data from the study without penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision. There are no penalties from withdrawing from the study.

#### **4. Are there any potential risks in participating?**

If you wish to participate in this study, you will not experience any risks other than what is experienced in everyday life. One benefit of participating in the study is that you will be able to reflect on your own engagement with technology and the community, and learn from the reflective experience.

#### **5. What happens with the results of the study?**

If you choose to participate in this study, your identity and data will remain anonymous and all information that you share with the researcher will be confidential and private. However, if, during the interview, it comes up that you are in danger, or that you have been hurt, the researcher would let the school principal know, so that they can make sure you are safe. The researcher will use pseudonyms, or false names, in the written reports so that your name and your school cannot be identified. The researcher will be the only person to access the data, which will be stored on a personal, password-protected computer.

#### **6. Will the research be published?**

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a doctoral thesis. After the thesis is submitted, it will be available both in print and online in the University archives accessible to all who wish to read it. The thesis may also be used in future conference presentations and journal articles, but in no way or at any time will your personal data become available.

#### **7. Who has reviewed this project?**

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

#### **8. What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please speak to the researcher, Julianne Viola (Julianne.Viola@education.ox.ac.uk), or Dr Rebecca Eynon (Rebecca.Eynon@oii.ox.ac.uk), who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how she intends to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee** at the University of Oxford (using the contact details here) who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner: Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD.

#### **9. What should I do next?**

If you would like to participate in this study, please complete the *consent form* that the researcher has given you, and return it to the researcher. Please remember that you may withdraw at any time, without penalty and without giving a reason by notifying the researcher.

**The University of Oxford**  
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15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY  
Julianne Viola | julianne.viola@education.ox.ac.uk



## **Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**

### **OPT OUT FORM**

Your child's school has agreed to take part in a study run by Oxford University looking at how teenagers use social media and engage in their school and wider communities. If your child takes part, a researcher would come to the school, and do an interview with your child.

If you **DO NOT** want your child to participate in the research, **Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**, please fill out the form below and return it to the school by **[DATE]**. If we do not receive an opt-out form from you, your child may be invited to take part in this study, as described in the accompanying information sheet.

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**I, the undersigned, hereby DO NOT give permission for my child to take part in the above study.**

Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent/guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Julianne Viola



## **Teen Social Media Use, Civic Engagement, and Civil Discourse**

CUREC approved 27 March 2015

### ***Student Consent Form***

The aim of this study is to investigate how technology and social media influence civil discourse among teenagers, ages 14-17. Through one-on-one in-depth interviews, participants will reflect on their civic identity, social media use, and civic engagement. The researcher will discover reasons for engagement and disengagement, and how technology has influenced the way in which teens talk about civic issues.

Please place a check in the appropriate boxes to show that you have read and understood the following information.

- |   | Check here:              |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the information sheet, have asked questions and received satisfactory answers  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw myself or my data at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I understand who will have access to the personal data that I have provided  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I understand how my personal data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I understand how research will be written up and published   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I understand how to raise concerns or make a complaint   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I agree to take part in the study.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher: Julianne Viola

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_