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Youth Culture, Organizational Values, and Participatory Politics in the Digital Spaces of Youth-Led Anti-Gun Violence Movements

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

YOUTH CULTURE, ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES,
AND PARTICIPATORY POLITICS IN
THE DIGITAL SPACES OF YOUTH-LED
ANTI-GUN VIOLENCE MOVEMENTS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

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CHICAGO, IL

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ABSTRACT

As traditional forms of participating in politics are waning in popularity and younger people are becoming more politically aware, new ways to engage in politics are emerging from the intersection of youth culture and digital spaces. One way of understanding this intersection of activism and youth culture is to analyze how youth-led activist organizations engage in participatory politics in the digital space. I analyze how anti-gun violence organizations March for Our Lives and GoodKids MadCity, led by youth activists, reflect a unique and distinct form of digital engagement, issue framing, and organizational culture. Through content analysis, I will be highlighting organizational comparison at the national and local levels—including comparison of strategies and organizational culture—as well as how, specifically, these organizations manifest their values and culture through digital media. I use public-facing data from social media accounts such as Twitter and TikTok from the past two years to complement analysis of the websites of the organizations themselves and any other informational materials geared towards the public.

The unique position of youth culture—immersed in the digital space, social media, and constant connectedness—and how that, combined with experience, results in activism, independence, and a sense of responsibility. This research allows for a greater understanding of the shifting political climate, including how and why youth activists are stepping up to lead such organizations for change and how they use their identities and culture to encourage others to do the same.

INTRODUCTION

As traditional forms of participating in politics become more obsolete and as younger people are becoming more politically aware, new ways to engage in politics are emerging from youth culture. Through social media and the internet to using nonpolitical communities as ways to organize and demonstrate, youth-led activism is changing the way social movements are seen in society. By looking at the intersectionality of youth culture, activism, and virtuality, the strategies with which these groups share their messages, ideology, and values can be illustrated. Focusing on anti-violence youth-led activist groups illustrates how the framing of interpersonal violence is often targeted at teens and young adults, such as messages promoting the understanding that school shootings can and do happen and it is the responsibility of the students to “look for the signs” of someone committing an act of violence. Further, spotlighting anti-violence youth-led activist groups demonstrates how messaging by students for their peers is more effective than messaging by adults. The goal of this study is to compare the ways in which national youth-led activist groups use nontraditional forms of politics to the ways in which local youth-led activist groups use nontraditional forms of politics. Due to the difference in scale, I expect a significant difference in framing and strategies regarding the use of participatory politics.

Organizational Theory and Participatory Politics

Looking at social movements through different types of institutionalism centralizes the intersection of participatory politics and institutional values. Social movements function as processes of collective action affecting formal institutions and can affect and be affected by the

people functioning within them. Inhabited institutionalism and organizational studies of digital spaces are important in analyzing youth culture in these spaces.

Inhabited Institutionalism. Inhabited institutionalism focuses on how institutional myths are used in a variety of organizations through “the agency of local actors to construct multiple and competing meanings through daily interactions in ways that enact the institutional environment” (Everitt and Levinson 2014). By looking at the macro level institutionalism (focusing on how institutions create structure for the individuals functioning within it) and looking at micro level symbolic interactionism (how individuals create meaning and culture through interaction), inhabited institutionalism illustrates the organization as a deep and complex social structure. Hallett and Ventresca (2006) argue that the pairing of these concepts provides a more in-depth view of institutions as a whole:

“On the one hand institutions provide the raw materials and guidelines for social interactions (“construct interactions”) and on the other, the meanings of institutions are constructed and propelled forward by social interactions. Institutions are not inert categories of meaning; rather, they are populated with people whose social interactions suffuse institutions with local force and significance.” (213).

Inhabited institutionalism bridges the micro and macro levels of analysis, accounting for the flexibility of institutions and the agency of the supra-individual. By using symbolic interactionism to analyze how people function in groups within organizations, the relationship between institutional values and group-creations of meaning is revealed. According to Hallett and Hawbaker (2020), “Inhabited institutionalism is a meso-approach for examining the recursive relationships among institutions, interactions, and organizations [and] provides novel and sociologically consistent means for dealing with issues of agency and change...” (1). By accounting for agency and change as well as institutions, interactions, and organizations, inhabited institutionalism is a logical choice to analyze youth activist groups.

Inhabited institutionalism also emphasizes how individuals' interactions inform the way an institution functions, but those interactions are in turn structured by institutional values. Reyes (2015) illustrates how institutional context can inform how activism is developed by observing three different Latino student groups on three different college campuses, finding that ties to the university (or lack thereof) directly relate to the types of activism students would engage in. Based on ties to the organization, the behavior of the individuals inhabiting it changed their behavior. Dalton (2016) also illustrates inhabited institutionalism by highlighting how younger generations are more engaged, more politically tolerant, and more supportive of social justice than older generations. Through the survey data, Dalton identifies types of citizenship. One of which is engaged citizenship, which includes participation in civil society groups, practicing moral or empathetic elements of citizenship, surveillance of the government, and a focus on helping those worse off both nationally and worldwide—and consists generally of younger people. According to Dalton (2016), “Overall, this second group of survey questions suggests a pattern of the socially engaged citizen: one who is aware of others, is willing to act on their principles, and is willing to challenge political elites” (29). By changing the citizenship norms and the foundations of political activity, the types of engagement and culture change in turn. As individuals function within the greater institution of US politics, they are both informed by and able to influence the norms of this institution—illustrating inhabited institutionalism.

Organizations and Digital Space. With the continued involvement of social media and digital space in everyday life, researchers are increasingly analyzing organizations within the context of the digital space. Looking specifically at both how organizations use social media to convey their organizational beliefs and values and how they tailor their public-facing digital presence to reflect that as well. Another aspect of organizations conveying values and beliefs is

manifested in networking to other organizations—connecting specifically to other organizations which support or convey the same messages and values.

Networks between organizations are one way to study organizational values and beliefs and how these values are reinforced through organizational connections. Pudrovskya (2004) focuses on the links between organizations in the digital world, illustrating what concepts or other organizational beliefs and issues were supported through a clear connection in public digital spaces. The use of network tracing illustrates the permanent connections between organizations online and illustrates how this creates a specific type of connection in the physical world as well. Langman (2005) also focuses on networking between organizations in virtual public spaces, focusing on the structure of digital-based movements specifically. These movements were described as “diffuse and unstructured...[forging] unlikely coalitions of labor, environmentalists, feminists, peace, and global social justice activists collectively...organized and coordinated through the Internet” (42). The unstructured structure of digital social movement organizations allowed for this fluid networking between a variety of activists, resulting in a more connected organization allowing for transnational activism.

Nah and Saxton (2013) specifically focus on the networking between organizational accounts and the greater virtual public. For example, looking at what types of organizations maintain multiple social media accounts and use them to communicate more frequently with their external public audiences. They analyze four key factors of social media usage by organizations: strategy, capacity, governance, and environment. These are used to examine social media utilization through adoption, frequency of use, and dialogue. By outlining the key factors in social media usage by organizations, we understand specifically how organizations uphold and

interact with their audiences on social media—audiences which are often composed of younger individuals.

Kang and Norton (2004) analyze how organizations use the Internet to fulfill organizational goals and whether they effectively used the Internet and succeeded in achieving these goals. Most organizations use simple Web design which results in a streamlined user experience, leading to more positive interactions with their websites. Kang and Norton (2004) also state that specific nonprofit organizations are not using the Internet to the best of their ability, citing issues in accessibility, functionality, outreach, and aesthetics. Chalmers and Shotton (2015) provide a more updated approach to organizational use of the Internet, looking at social media specifically. They outline how organizations use social media for advocacy goals and how effective social media is as a tool. Chalmers and Shotton (2015) analyze the function of social media in two ways: the importance organizations place on shaping lobbying debates through media and the importance they place on shaping their image through the media. These nonprofit organizations use social media as a part of news media lobbying strategies, making interaction with audiences calculated to create the most support and recruit the most constituents, illustrating how these organizations intersect with political opportunity, participatory politics, and youth culture.

Evolution of Youth Political Engagement

Youth political engagement has evolved towards a more human-rights-based focus using digital media due to political and social context. The shifting of engagement has occurred in the past 15-20 years, highlighting the differences between national and local organizations. According to Swanson (2000), political engagement is based on political and media contexts which influence political communication—resulting in engagement (or lack thereof). Swanson

states that the change in focus to non-traditional political issues created new power centers which are more effective in addressing issues such as lifestyles, the environment, and human rights. These new political centers include the growing number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which offer new structures for citizens to act on issues they care about, and single-issue groups; protest movements; and other associations found in advanced democracies. The various organizations, both NGO and single-issue, are gaining more traction and are increasingly given voice in national and transnational policy forums.

These new power centers are continuing to be emphasized as political engagement and context continues to evolve—specifically, among younger generations. According to multiple studies, youth engagement in politics is perceived to be declining when looking solely at traditional forms of political engagement (Jenkins et al, 2016; Dalton, 2016; Fisher 2012; Chrysochoou and Barrett, 2017). However, this perception of decreasing interest in engagement is a consequence of changing methods of youth engagement; by studying the new ways youth engage civically and politically, engagement has actually increased. According to Chrysochoou and Barrett (2017), young people often reject practices of political discourse, considering them to be ill-connected to reality and exclusionary of young voices. Instead of participating in political engagement such as voting, lobbying, or campaigning, younger individuals are engaging in other ways—such as through online community connections, interaction with activist symbolic images, new media usage, and through virtual storytelling (Jenkins et al. 2016; Dalton 2016; Chrysochoou and Barrett 2017). When researching youth political engagement, many scholars use the concept of participatory politics to illustrate how youth activism differs from traditional forms of activism.

Youth and Participatory Politics

Analyzing the use of participatory politics by younger generations is a common theme in youth activism literature. Jenkins et. al (2016) defines participatory politics as “that point where participatory culture meets political and civic participation, where political change is promoted through social and cultural mechanisms rather than through established political institutions, and where citizens see themselves as capable of expressing their political concerns—often through the production and circulation of media” (2). Participatory politics shines due to the change in power centers that Swanson (2000) outlines, with participatory politics and other grassroots movements stepping in to fill the gap left by broken down and unreliable traditional political structures.

Jenkins et. al (2016) also outlines the use of social media, spreadable videos, memes, and online communities by young men and women to bring about political change. Jenkins et. Al (2016) find that youth online and offline activism are in a reinforcement cycle, encouraging participation and continuing support, even after the rallies end (212). Those who engage in participatory politics are also more likely to be involved in institutional politics, citing how personal digital storytelling often translates into action in the physical world: “Simply put, feelings of attachment and group worthiness are what motivate individuals to act on behalf of the collective” (208) and the online activism through consumable media is the way to engage those feelings.

Fisher (2012) emphasizes the bridge between youth activism and electoral politics, focusing on the way that media and communications technologies are being used by young people to participate in more traditional political action. According to Fisher (2012), the importance of Web 2.0 (or the age of social media and better technology) can be found in

political organizing: “Although previous discussions have explored how computer-mediated communication affects face-to-face contact, a general consensus has emerged that, rather than replacing personal contact, these technologies supplement it”, which makes activism faster and more universal in organization and action (125). Fisher (2012) finds, however, that it is not only activism that uses this technology, but institutional politics as well, as indicated by the increase of social media, text messaging, and app use in the 2008 elections; this finding has been echoed in the 2012 and 2016 elections, utilizing popular social media platforms for campaigning to younger generations. This, in turn, changes the way teens and young adults interact with political issues, ideas, and candidates. Fisher (2012) analyzed main themes in youth participation in activism by focusing on pathways to participation; the role of gender and race; and the ways that information and communications technologies are used by young people to participate in multiple aspects of the political process. These pathways to participation include activism and community organizing—social movements for institutional change.

The use of virtuality and youth culture as a tool for social movements can be viewed in youth-led activist models and general youth activism. Nardi (2015), when analyzing virtuality and activism, speaks about the affordances and accessibility of social media activism. Nardi (2015) states, “people in authoritarian nations may be reluctant to express dissident views because they feel isolated and fearful but that technologies such as Facebook and Twitter could change that” (20). Nardi (2015) also analyzes how technology provides a zero-cost form of activism; it is easier to send emails than post letters, easier to connect with hundreds of people online rather than meet in public, and easier to create a network of networking which increases the reach of activism greatly.

Tatarchevskiy (2011) agrees with this, stating that “many non-profit and advocacy and philanthropy organizations now utilize social networking sites, allowing Web 2.0 to do the work of connecting people that share a passion for a social cause”, using these everyday individuals to draw attention to their cause and to make their organizations’ claims legitimate and visible (302). Tatarchevskiy (2011) continues, illustrating how “tapping into online social networks for similar purposes may facilitate activism and make it much more compatible with the busy lives of modern individuals” and how “a certain culture of civic engagement is pushed forward, perhaps even renewed” (310). Jenkins et al. (2016) takes this one step further, emphasizing how young activists specifically use their culture to not only network, but to make easily consumed videos, images, and posts. Due to their complete immersion in social media and other online communities, younger people have a deep understanding of how to create media which is relatable to and highly consumable by their peers. This media goes viral, contributing to social awareness of the issue the media is based on.

By incorporating the virtual into activism, organizations have a greater reach to different populations of individuals, resulting in an expansion of their movement. Sutton and Vacarezza (2020) is an excellent example of visual materials involved in activist organizations, addressing specifics on how organizations craft images, symbols, and aesthetic strategies, the meanings they convey, and how these images fit, contradict, or exceed the dimensions of the political culture in which they are situated. Activists in Argentina use specific visuals to communicate notions of safe abortion, confront the antiabortion camp, and help articulate agendas that include sexual and reproductive rights as a part of expansive human rights. Most symbols that are chosen by youth-led social movement organizations, while being steeped in popular culture, also draw on local political histories and a well-known symbol which connects to the issue they address.

Youth Culture and Virtuality in Social Movements

Interpersonal connection is a central part of successful social movements. Jenkins et. Al (2016) stated that interpersonal connections both in-person and online are a reinforcement cycle for participation in activism. By participating in online activism, individuals are drawn into physical action, and are then retained as supporters by continuing to engage in the community online. One of the main aspects of the participatory culture outlined in the sections above is the use of youth culture as a tool for creating those interpersonal connections needed in social movements. Stornaiuolo and Thomas (2017) analyze the use of digital activism to disrupt educational inequalities. When studying how younger generations use digital activism, they noticed that

“rather than allowing adults to dominate narratives on issues facing adolescents...young people today, particularly those from marginalized groups, are using social media, online fandom, and other kinds of digital affinity groups to re-story the popular imagination by shaping it into their own image” (338).

By using their own image, younger generations are imbuing the activist media with their own culture, making it more relatable and understandable to those their age. Digital youth activism is defined as “adolescent and young adult online practices that involve political, civic, social, or cultural action oriented toward social change or transformation” (338).

The intersection of youth culture, youth digital activism, and social movements has developed a new tool for youth-led social movements to utilize. Zimmerman (2016) states “youth-led organizations have developed culturally relevant organizational structures, redefined and healed intergenerational relationships, and become rich environments for individual and community development” for themselves and their demographic (302). The creation of youth-led organizations for youth-focused issues is one way in which younger generations can implement

their ideas on citizenship and activism--relating to others through slang, jokes, and popular viral images. Zimmerman (2016) highlights the focus on youth-based issues by analyzing the creation of youth-led activist organizations:

“Across the nation, a significant number of young people have realized they needed to form their own organizations to support their generation’s development and activism. Tellingly, these young people have often been the most marginalized by educational policies and social and economic conditions. These organizations have made youth leadership a core principle of their missions, focusing not only on external change, but also, on how their organizations operate internally” (300).

The creation of youth-led activism based on the marginalization of younger people is a reason why youth culture and youth activism are so interconnected. The digital storytelling used by youth activists is one strategy which allows for the emotional and social connection between themselves and their online community members.

Youth Activism and Gun Violence

By focusing on anti-violence and gun control, I can illustrate how youth culture, virtuality, and activism intersect to obtain and maintain constituents for their cause more successfully than organizations led by adult activists on behalf of younger people. Zimmerman (2016) states “There is no one model or framework that will work for all youth-led and intergenerational models; each is intimately connected to the culture in which they are centered and the specific issues on which they focus.” (313). One such issue that is deeply connected to this younger generation of activists is gun violence and the advocacy for gun control which informs their activism. Although national opinion on gun control is commonly measured, Van Sparrentak et. al (2018) realized that little is known about how youth feel about gun control. The opinions of younger generations are affected by the collective trauma of school shootings being normalized in education and training, and therefore, should be measured when analyzing

opinions on gun control. Van Sparrentak et. al (2018) states, “Youth, having been the target of several mass shootings, are positioning themselves as both the present and the future of the gun control debate and are taking the lead in public discourse” through activism (884). Van Sparrentak et. al’s (2018) study finds that a majority of young people believe that gun control laws would reduce mass shootings, “suggesting legislative action that they believed would make the country safer” (885). Wu (2018) analyzes how media and framing of gun control and gun rights can influence the way younger generations view gun control. For example, Wu (2018) states that attitudes about gun control are “strongly related to self-identified political preferences...and were significantly shaped by the framing of the survey questions and the prompting of certain relevant information” (16).

One example of national youth-led gun control movements is the March for Our Lives (MFOL) organization focused on gun control to prevent school shootings. Zoller and Casteel (2021) outline the tragic beginning of MFOL:

“When 17 of their fellow classmates died at the hands of a 19-year-old former student who entered Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School with a Smith & Wesson M&P15 an AR-15 style assault rifle), a group of student survivors organized using the hashtags #MarchForOurLives and #NeverAgain.” (1)

The students began organizing a digital and social media campaign after the tragic story was aired on national news media, resulting in a national school walkout on March 14th. The students of MSDHS continue to engage in media-activism and activist-writing to encourage support for gun control, using their experiences as survivors as an emotional foundation for interpersonal connections. Because of their age, these students were also able to recruit other students to work with them. Students also were able to use their skill in social media to quickly organize the digital campaign and use social media to their advantage: “observers attributed the group’s

successes in revitalizing gun debates to their age and tragic experience, but also to their political and media savvy.” (Zoller and Casteel 2).

In comparison, the local anti-gun violence group in Chicago called GoodKids MadCity (GKMC) focuses on the use of social media to enhance connection to community and spread the word about specific individuals in the community that need help. GoodKids MadCity is “an anti-gun violence group entirely led by black and brown youth from the South and West Sides. In Chicago, theirs are the communities that disproportionately bear the cost of the city’s high rates of gun violence” (Bellware 1). By utilizing the unique teamwork which results from an all youth-led, community-based, nonprofit group, these young people can provide support, resources, and events around anti-gun violence in the community. These events include open-mic nights, “feed the block” events to distribute food to neighbors in need, and safe, free recreational activities for young kids.

Although most of the media focus is on national school shootings, Taylor Norwood, a member of GKMC, states “Gun violence doesn’t just look like mass shootings. It looks like kid not being able to go to and from school at regular times. It looks like them not being able to go outside and play. Kids don’t know if they’re safe. They’re afraid for their lives.” (Bellware 3). Norwood and the other members of GKMC are using their own experiences of gun violence to reinforce the fact that communities are often composed largely of young people who are hurt by violence—not violent young people. GKMC also has an interesting framing—a comparison between themselves and the MFOL national organization, citing them as the inspiration for the group while also being a main reason that non-mass shooting gun violence goes ignored: “On a single August weekend...seven people were killed and nearly 60 more were injured by gunfire. The shootings mostly went uncovered, with little attention given to the people the victims had

been, concerns over what may have prompted the violence, or discussions of how to stop it.” (Bellware 2019). However, during this time, the nation was fixating on school shootings as the main source of gun violence against young people.

While GKMC may not have the widespread resources of MFOL, they have been successful in lobbying and creating solutions through policy development. For example, GKMC has created The Peace Book, the goals of which are to “establish the practice of peace as a norm in Chicago neighborhoods most affected by gun violence and to highlight and publicize the positive developments flourishing daily in these neighborhoods” (GKMC 1). This ordinance would divert funding from CPD towards a commission of individuals representing GKMC, the blocks, neighborhoods, and groups on Chicago’s South and West sides, and “other individuals engaged in street-survival lifestyles from over-policed communities, particularly Black and Brown youth” (GKMC 1). Through helping the community, GoodKids MadCity is creating a sense of connection and recreation that is safe for kids. Their use of social media, rather than focusing on strictly anti-gun violence rhetoric, focuses on sharing community events and creating a sense of unity resulting in a more peaceful neighborhood.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

My study expands on the literature of digital youth activism, participatory politics, and youth culture in the context of anti-gun violence national and local organizations. There is a difference in the ways that national and local anti-gun violence organizations utilize digital storytelling, interpersonal connections, and the reinforcement cycle between online and in-person activism. By doing a deep comparison on the use of framing, social media, and participatory politics within the national and local organizations, I illustrate how these two groups use the same concepts of participatory politics to emphasize different aspects of anti-gun violence activism. There are two sets of questions that guide this research.

The first set of questions focus on organizational comparison at the national and local levels, specifically looking at how organizational culture is formed, and the strategies used by these different organizations to work towards the same goal: What are the differences between framing, values, and culture around gun violence on the national versus the local levels? How do March for Our Lives and Good Kids Mad City use digital spaces to gain constituents? Do March for Our lives and Good Kids Mad City use similar methods in different ways?

The second set of questions focuses on how, specifically, these organizations manifest their values and culture through digital media: How do digital spaces play a role in the creation and dissemination of organizational culture in March for Our Lives and GoodKids MadCity? How does youth culture inform the way local and national organizations disseminate their

organizational culture and values? How do environmental and experiential differences affect the way these specific organizations approach the issue of gun violence?

Case Selection

The increase of youth activist-led organizations that address issues mainly affecting children, such as gun violence or climate change issues, reflects shifting political environments and justice-focused perspectives. Being youth-led, these organizations bring a better understanding of the digital sphere and how that is inherently linked to youth culture on both a local and national level. The comparison between these two levels of analysis is central to this work for two reasons. First, that institutional theory, according to Schneiburg and Clemens (2006), "requires research designs that link levels of analysis...[comparing] the explanatory power of factors at the same, or lower, level of analysis as the entity in question with the explanatory power of external or higher-order factors" (195). Second, the differences in experiences, environments, and reach of these youth activists lead to differences in organizational values and recruitment strategies. Therefore, a more in-depth analysis of anti-gun violence organizations is needed. I chose March for Our Lives due to their widespread popularity and established status as a national youth-led anti-gun violence movement with success in policy changes and political advocacy. GoodKids MadCity was chosen due to their interactions with MFOL during the 2018 National Road to Change Tour as well as their community-based understandings of solving gun violence in Chicago. GoodKids MadCity was also chosen for geographic location, as interviews with the activists in this group could contribute greatly to further research based on this project.

Data

The data sources for each organization come from a variety of social media websites as well as the actual official websites of each organization. IRB approval was not necessary for the data utilized in this project as my research qualified as exempt. For March for Our Lives, the official website (<https://marchforourlives.com>), twitter page (@AMarch4OurLives), TikTok page (@amarch4ourlives), and Facebook page (<facebook.com/marchforourlives>) resulted in a rich and diverse amount of information to analyze. For the local organizations, however, there was not as much information due to the use of in-person meetings and recruitment directly from schools. Concrete sources of data for GoodKids MadCity includes their twitter page (@GKMC18), website (<https://gkmcenglewood.com>), and their Facebook page (<facebook.com/gkmc2018>). GoodKids MadCity also has a TikTok page, but no public videos are available for analysis. I pulled community announcements, recruitment articles, and public “about” pages from the official websites. From social media, I analyzed the most recent posts from each organization, discounting retweets or response tweets.

I analyzed a total of 150 tweets per organization, the first ten TikToks for MFOL that used trending audio, and the official websites for each organization. I included descriptions of visual materials included in tweets and posts, including photos, infographics, videos, event recruitment, and news article links. Once the data was gathered, a two-step coding process occurred. The first step of this process was open coding, in order to gain a more focused code to identify common themes and notable differences between these organizations. Next, this more focused code was used to identify trends and patterns within the data. My coding scheme was loosely based on the rhetoric and vocabulary used by both GoodKids MadCity and March for Our Lives, specifically in their mission statements and policy draft suggestions. Most of the data

that I analyzed acknowledged previous actions taken to prevent gun violence—either by their own organization or by others—as well as more theoretical issues of gun violence, like the causes of gun violence and language used to frame the issue. I also noticed mentions of the goals of each of the organizations which were framed differently.

Due to the variations in type of digital content, I used NVivo to track type of data, where this content was found, and number of views (if relevant) as well as the focused thematic codes. On each official website, I analyzed language used in community announcements, recruitment articles, and public “about” pages for organizational values and framing. This includes both perspective about gun violence as well as the focus on specific solutions for gun violence. Looking at the official pages highlights the differences on the local and national levels, while social media pages show similarities in the use of youth culture and trends. Social media posts were used to analyze the intersection of these organizational values and youth culture.

In order to analyze the data gathered, data such as TikToks or other video-based media with any music or spoken language were transcribed. Next, descriptive language was used to convey visuals which are important to understanding the underlying meaning behind the videos and different aspects of youth culture involved. These transcriptions were then added to other data for analysis. I used NVivo software for qualitative analysis. These transcriptions and other types of data, such as tweets, flyers, or articles, were then coded in a more traditional two-step manner. I used inductive coding to develop a list of codes based on the data used by the activists in their documents and posts. These include the causes of gun violence, clearly defined by March for Our Lives in their Policy Plan: armed supremacy, gun glorification, political apathy and corruption, poverty, and the national mental health crisis. For unique terms, I utilized the definitions provided by March for Our Lives:

Gun glorification is the belief embedded in our culture that power and safety are derived from guns. In this country, we put guns on a pedestal and prioritize firearm access over access to human needs. This makes guns extremely easy to access—easier than housing or medical care. **Armed supremacy** is the use of guns and the threat of gun violence to reinforce power structures, hierarchies, and status. It is how individuals or groups of people reinforce their perceived value relative to those with less power. It is how white supremacy and patriarchy survive. **Political apathy and corruption** is the gradual destruction of the democratic principle that power comes from the people. It happens when politics fails to change lived outcomes for those it's meant to serve. Politicians use voters to gain power for themselves, but the voters get little in return. People become apathetic because they are not valued or empowered. (MFOL Policy Plans, emphasis in original)

It was important to use these specific understandings of the causes of gun violence due to the detail provided in the definitions and their direct connection to MFOL and GKMC's understandings of how to end gun violence. The concepts of gun glorification and armed supremacy are relatively unique to March for Our Lives and the clear definition of political apathy and corruption was a guideline for what I was looking for. After creating general codes based on the activist language, I was able to group these more specific codes into general themes in the second round of coding.

COMPARING NATIONAL AND LOCAL GROUPS

One of the main goals of this project is to compare how national and local youth-led anti-gun violence movements differ from each other in group composition, solutions to shared problems, how gun violence is framed, and how organizational values are conveyed and shared through different engagement strategies. Each of these components affect the way activists can interact with their organization and can build their foundations of support in ending gun violence.

Group Composition Differences

One of the main differences between national and local anti-gun violence groups is the composition of activists who are involved in the organizations. According to the inhabited institutionalism framework, how an organization functions and how its values are understood and shared is partly explained by its members. By understanding the differences in each organization's membership and constituents, we can also understand organizational ability, recruitment strategies, and organizational culture.

GoodKids MadCity is composed of roughly 50 members, ranging in age from sophomores in high school to young adults in their twenties. In GoodKids MadCity, most of the members are people of color who reside in Englewood, a neighborhood in Chicago's South Side. According to the American Community Survey, as of 2019, Englewood had a median household income of \$22,127. The population was 24,369 and the reported racial demographic of the population was 94.6% Black, 3.7% Hispanic or Latine, and less than 1% each of White, Asian, and Other. 20% of the population is also between the ages of 5 and 19. To summarize,

Englewood is an urban, low-income, and majority Black neighborhood with a lot of school age children. In the eyes of the GKMC activists, Englewood is underfunded and ignored in plans to improve Chicago. Because of this, the community environment itself informs the way that GoodKids MadCity functions as an organization. For example, the students involved in GoodKids MadCity show frustration towards their local government and community leaders for resisting community-based policy practices and resources. These members take it upon themselves to advocate for their own community and call out those in power who ignore their troubles. GoodKids MadCity also advocates against multiple forms of violence, rather than gun violence alone. Through their community service work, they assist in a variety of issues which are the result of systemic racism and structural oppression built into the legal system of Chicago and the United States in general. These issues include housing and food insecurity, employment, and community resources as well as gun violence.

March for Our Lives, on the other hand, is a large organization composed of activists from throughout the country ranging in age from sophomores in high school to assistant organizers in their thirties. The core organizers are mainly survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida. According to the U.S. Census, in 2021, Parkland's population was 35,265 with a racial demographic breakdown of 76.5% White, 16.5% Hispanic or Latine, 8.5% Black, and 7.9% Asian. 33.5% of the population are people under 18 years old. The median income for Parkland is also \$159,692, a difference of \$137,565 between Parkland and Englewood. Parkland is a high-income, mainly white suburban city community with a lot of school age children. The community of Parkland differs greatly to that of Englewood just as much as the activists from Parkland differ from the activists in Chicago. The Parkland activists are mainly white students who had a traumatic and sudden exposure to gun

violence, resulting in an outrage and a responsibility for passing legislation so that no other students would have to experience something similar. Very few of the core organizers were concerned with gun violence before their own victimization in their high school, unlike GoodKids MadCity activists, who state that they have been exposed to gun violence at a young age in a variety of environments.

Additionally, resource availability highlights a major difference between the two organizations. March for Our Lives raised over \$3.58 million in donations to support their organization's work in ending gun violence in their first year. Due to high media coverage, national attention was drawn to the founders of March for Our Lives and the organization itself, resulting in more resource availability for this organization and therefore, the ability to work on a bigger scale. GKMC, on the other hand, has very little media attention and has difficulty in raising money for the Mutual Aid fund and other community-pool resources from their organization—raising less than one thousand dollars in the same time period. This highlights a difference in visibility, experiences, and resources between the two organizations. Because of this inequality in resource availability, March for Our Lives attempts to work with local activists like GoodKids MadCity to elevate the voices of oppressed groups who may not get as much media exposure as the Parkland students. This collaboration effort and the similar ages of activists in each group resulted in the two groups working closely together when March for Our Lives visited Chicago during the 2018 Road to Change Summer Tour.

Common Goals, Different Solutions

The shared goals for March for Our Lives and GoodKids MadCity focus on both concrete and abstract milestones. March for Our Lives explicitly states that they aim to end gun violence, provide support for communities which predominately face gun violence, increase regulations

for gun ownership, and encourage youth leadership in activism. While GoodKids MadCity does not explicitly state the same goals, the continued collaboration between the two groups, as well as organizational language, emphasizes very similar goals. GoodKids MadCity participated in the 2018 National Road to Change working with MFOL activists to register young voters and shows great support for MFOL ideas to end gun violence, provide support for communities, and increase youth activism. However, there are differences as well. Where March for Our Lives aims to increase gun ownership regulations, GoodKids MadCity sees this as putting Black and Brown communities more at risk. Where GoodKids MadCity emphasizes community-based mutual aid as a priority, March for Our Lives focuses on victories within the traditional political sphere to obtain their goals.

Regulating Gun Ownership. March for Our Lives aims to end gun violence by increasing regulations for gun ownership. The raising standards for gun ownership includes “a national licensing and registry system that promotes responsible gun ownership; a ban on assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and other weapons of war; policies to disarm gun owners who pose a harm risk; and a national gun buy-back program to reduce the estimated 265-393 million firearms in circulation by at least 30%” (MFOL Policy Plans). Much of the work that MFOL has done in the political arena directly addresses raising standards for gun ownership as their concrete goal. For example, filing written comments supporting acts such as the Vote Without Fear Act, which prohibits open carrying at polling locations, or creating a petition for Universal Background Checks, “a gun violence prevention measure that 90% of Americans support” (MFOL 03/25/22). Parkland students fell victim to a school shooter who obtained his AR-15 assault weapon through legal means in a Florida gun store, passing the required background check regardless of a history of violence and threatening behavior. The March for

Our Lives activists claim that with increased gun ownership regulations and a ban of assault rifles and other “weapons of war”, the number of similar onetime traumatic incidents would be greatly reduced. Because the man who killed their classmates was able to legally purchase his weapon to do so, March for Our Lives is very passionate about gun ownership regulation.

Yet GoodKids MadCity fears that increasing regulations for gun ownership will further criminalize Black and Brown communities. While they work closely with MFOL activists and understand their perspective, GKMC activists also state that when increased regulations are implemented, the burden of new regulations falls on already heavily policed communities. They tweeted about the issue on May 25, 2022:

Reminder to everyone calling for stricter gun laws in the U.S. (while ignoring it primarily criminalizes/impacts Black & Brown people) that America & it's defense contractors & other corporate arms dealers are the biggest suppliers of weapons Internationally!
Abolish Imperialism!

Some of the members of GoodKids MadCity explain that while some communities are afraid that their students will be shot at school, students in their community are afraid of not even making it to school. Some of the members of GoodKids MadCity are also victims of gun violence themselves or have close friends and relatives who have been killed in sudden acts of violence in the street. GoodKids MadCity activists grew up in an environment permeated with gun violence, having almost constant feelings of fear and danger. Because MFOL students were affected by gun violence in a markedly different way than GoodKids MadCity activists, their experiences inform their policy choices. GoodKids MadCity activists have a very different experience with gun violence than the activists involved in March for Our Lives. This illustrates the differences between lived experiences which inform policy.

End Gun Violence. MFOL states that gun violence in America is fueled by gun glorification, armed supremacy, political apathy and corruption, poverty, and the national mental health crisis. Each of these are clearly defined on the MFOL website and included in my coding scheme as detailed in the Methods section above. MFOL addresses each of these causes as a problem to be solved by their Policy Plan, protest action, and traditional political change through lobbying and advocacy. MFOL's strategy is to address gun violence by addressing the causes of it, starting with gun glorification, armed supremacy, and political apathy. By addressing how gun glorification and armed supremacy affect power structures directly in tweets, MFOL is aiming for a cultural shift in how American society sees guns. March for Our Lives highlights the prolific amount of police violence as an example of armed supremacy: "We must never forget that the fight to end gun violence includes the fight to end police violence. The whole system must be held accountable for innocent lives stolen. Rest in peace, Patrick Lyoya." (4/22/22). In addition to calling attention to armed supremacy, one of the concrete ways that MFOL is shifting culture around gun violence is through the creation of the Universal Background Checks and raising standards for gun ownership, their first goal. As for political apathy, MFOL utilizes framing of current events and political news through infographics and trending topics to advocate for new elected officials, voter registration, and voter turnout for the demographic which cares the most about gun violence: young people.

GoodKids MadCity approaches gun violence slightly differently, focusing on a restorative and transformative justice model to help their communities heal while still acknowledging armed supremacy and political apathy in action. GKMC's understanding of gun violence as a symptom of deeply rooted systemic inequality facing their community leads to a community-focused approach to a solution. Like MFOL, GKMC often uses public shaming of

American politicians on social media. However, they often focus on local Chicago politicians, including Mayor Lori Lightfoot, to draw attention to the structural inequality that politicians reinforce with their apathetic approach to violence on the South Side. GoodKids MadCity also highlights a link between political apathy and police violence in Chicago. They explain that instead of listening to community members who spoke at town halls, Lori Lightfoot increased the police academy budget, putting these communities more at risk. GKMC draws attention to police violence in the community, as their neighbors are overly policed and criminalized, often becoming the victims of armed supremacy in action. The community and environment experiences of gun violence have influenced GKMC's chosen strategies and proposed solutions. These solutions include community-based resources and mutual aid support, as well as improving availability of health care in their neighborhoods. Because of the constant letdown by policy in helping their communities, GKMC emphasizes creating a community whose members help each other.

Providing Community Support. While March for Our Lives' main focus is on ending gun violence and changing policies to enforce that, GoodKids MadCity places an emphasis on what they call Mutual Aid, or communities providing for themselves and caring for each other within their community. Most of the actions that GKMC takes are based in collaboration with other organizations within the greater Chicago community, like KOCO, Babes Only Fun, and BECOME, which are all groups dedicated to racial justice and community support in different areas of Chicago. GKMC's main goal is to improve the community and the lives of the people within it, regardless of the type of misfortune or inequality that affects them, one of which is gun violence. GKMC also organizes events to improve the community, like their Work Force Development programming to lower unemployment rates and the W.E. Got This campaign to

create and support local Black-owned businesses. GoodKids MadCity are specifically promoting community support programming and acting to directly change their community.

March for Our Lives also promotes community support, but in a less concrete and more theoretical way. In their Mission Statement, MFOL acknowledges that gun violence predominantly affects certain communities which need increased resources. However, their focus is still on national policy. To encourage local communities and support, MFOL campaigns on behalf of local organizations to raise resources, money, and support. For example, MFOL Illinois specifically gathered donations for the Mutual Aid Fund that GoodKids MadCity has organized. The national chapter of MFOL also elevated the voices of the community during their Road to Justice campaign in the summer of 2018 by focusing the media attention on local groups and local activists. While there are no concrete policy changes for community support through MFOL, there are still strategies for community support built into how MFOL functions as an organization.

Encouraging Youth Leadership. Both organizations are committed to encouraging youth activism, leadership, and involvement in issues that directly affect them. Both organizations acknowledge that adult activists who try to organize on behalf of their children or the young adults around them often cannot reach the demographics of those they are organizing. However, by utilizing young activists as the main organizers, these organizations are more likely to connect with their intended constituents. For MFOL, their constituency is formed of young voters, those who are 18, just turned 18, or will turn 18 soon. March for Our Lives had a relevant and significant impact on the voting turnout for young voters, including registering young people to vote themselves and bringing understanding of personal political power to younger generations

who underestimate their ability for change through the system in place. On May 23, 2022, March for Our Lives tweeted

Its Election Day in GA and TX! Young voters have flexed our political power for the last three election cycles and 2022 will be no different. Check out our scorecards to see where the candidates stand on gun violence, a top issue for youth in America 📍

They continue to connect their younger constituents with political opportunity through providing voters with “scorecards” for candidates in certain states based on their stances on gun violence.

Therefore, they inform voters in an easily digestible and appealing manner through social media infographics.

For GoodKids MadCity, children and teens are a key group for organizing, filled with outrage and demands for justice and better treatment. GoodKids MadCity is mostly composed of high school and early college students with a few adult mentors who assist in developing the details. The ideas for all events, tweets, and strategies are democratically decided by the young people of Englewood. By the time these kids reach high school, they have already been exposed to gun violence and disappointed by city officials working to prevent it. On May 15, 2022, GoodKids MadCity tweeted

Apparently in #Chicago children & teens don't have civil rights because the Mayor can enforce martial law against youth! Wtf was the point of your fake “youth” town halls about public safety if you ain't listening to teens & continue to criminalize us @chicagosmayor #DefundCPD 📍

Here, it is not only clear that children and teens are trying to advocate for themselves and their safety, but also that children and teens are the most common victims of both violence within the community and criminalization by police. Additionally, many tweets by GoodKids MadCity conveyed thoughts, prayers, and comfort to the families of child and teen victims of gun violence in Chicago. These generally accompanied links to GoFundMe accounts for funeral or memorial

services. Tweets in memory of victims or acknowledging the struggles of the survivors are all too common on GoodKids MadCity's page, highlighting the issues with violence in Chicago.

Proposed Solutions. While these goals are similar, the solutions proposed, and actions taken by each group to solve these problems differ greatly. For example, March for Our Lives advocates for youth voting, political policy changes, and the support for non-apathetic government officials who care about ending gun violence. Their solutions for gun violence reflect the scale of the organization itself by channeling nation-wide changes, focusing on the federal government enacting universal gun ownership laws as well as reducing the power of the gun lobby and the NRA in US federal politics. The Policy Plan written by March for Our Lives provides policy-focused solutions for national gun violence, focusing on functioning within the established political system to obtain their goals. MFOL utilizes more traditional forms of politics in their proposed solutions, such as encouraging younger people to register and vote in their local elections as well as their national elections.

Whereas MFOL is goal-centered in their approach to ending gun violence, GoodKids MadCity is community-focused, identifying specific issues in the community which can lead to violence and proposing community-based solutions. GoodKids MadCity has created the Peace Book Ordinance, directly created as an opposite to the Gang Book. The Peace Book provides resources to reduce youth incarceration, create restorative justice practices within the community, model neighborhood peace treaties, identify Peace Keepers in each ward to moderate violence and peace, and propose remedies to gun violence. While MFOL's Policy Plan treats gun violence as a cause of major issues nationally, GKMC's Peace Book Ordinance focuses on gun violence as a symptom of systemic and structural oppression and advocates for community resources to prevent violence. For example, the Peace Book's solutions for ending

gun violence include “free drug treatment centers, trauma centers, trauma-informed schools, mental health care clinics, standby psychiatrists or therapists, restorative justice, community centers, transformative justice, fair housing, food justice, and economic justice” (Peace Book Ordinance). The Peace Book also proposes less conventional forms of policy within the neighborhood, such as restorative and transformative justice practices, rather than working within the established court system that so often harms underprivileged communities. Working in less conventional ways is a marked difference between how the local and national anti-gun violence groups plan to solve the problems of gun violence.

March for Our Lives: Framing Violence to End an Epidemic

March for Our Lives frames gun violence in a variety of ways. The importance of national-level gun regulation advocacy and determination to work within traditional forms of politics influences how March for Our Lives frames gun violence in the United States. Their frames medicalize gun violence, appeal to emotion, and shame American society and politicians by using counter-rhetoric, scientific authority, and youth culture.

The first and most prominent is through medicalizing the issue of gun violence. Medicalization is defined as “the process by which non-medical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually as illnesses or disorders” (Conrad et al 2010, p.1943). In the context of gun violence, this includes referring to gun violence as a deadly epidemic, urging people to listen to doctors about gun violence, and stating that gun violence is a leading cause of death in young people. By using the language that is commonly associated with health issues and medical advice, March for Our Lives is causing a cultural shift in understanding what gun violence is and beginning the process of the medicalization of gun violence. Rather than a criminalized activity, gun violence becomes a sickness affecting communities and individuals.

By framing this issue as a health problem, March for Our Lives aims to decriminalize communities which are often blamed for gun violence, like people of color and those with mental illnesses. Examples of the use of medicalized language include statements such as “President Biden and all our elected officials must act with a fierce urgency to call this crisis what it is: a national public health emergency” and “Every day in America, more than 100 lives are taken by the deadly epidemic of gun violence” (MFOL Policy Plans). Medicalization of this issue takes away a taboo understanding of the victims and perpetrators, like how addiction has been medicalized in the last thirty years. In utilizing medicalized language, March for Our Lives also reduces victim blaming when it comes to gun violence.

Additionally, by making this a health issue, March for Our Lives can rely on scientific and medical authority, or how most people will trust medical professionals over other types of authority due to the legitimacy society assigns to the medical profession. March for Our Lives also uses health statistics on gun violence, such as referring to morbidity and mortality of gun violence in the American population. Other common language used to refer to gun violence includes medicalized language such as “symptoms”, “root cause”, and “leading cause of death”, which is more commonly used for health statistics. March for Our Lives also advocated for the CDC to research gun violence as a national health crisis, more deeply connecting gun violence to already established health issues like mental health:

We’re at the Capitol with @bradybuzz asking our lawmakers to fund @CDCgov research into one of the deadliest epidemics of our time—gun violence. The CDC hasn’t been able to research gun violence for 20 years, but we know researching it can save lives
#WeNeedToKnow (06/11/19).

By connecting gun violence to mental health mainly through examples such as school shootings and suicides, rather than murder or assault, contributes to the reframing of gun violence to a

medical issue. National public health issues are also pressing issues to solve and are prioritized by politicians, another reaction which March for Our Lives aims to get from medicalizing gun violence.

Another way that March for Our Lives brings attention to gun violence as a political issue is through encouraging emotion in those that consume their content. For example, talking about their own experiences as gun violence survivors and having friends and families of victims come forward to speak about their loved ones: “What we have been crying out, what we’ve been demanding since we walked out in millions in 2018, is that we deserve life. We have a fundamental right to live, and live without fearing for our lives” (1/18/22). March for Our Lives uses specific language and stories to bring forward emotion in supporters around gun control. They often bring attention to the disproportionate number of young people who die from gun violence aims to bring sadness, stating “@POTUS, guns are the leading cause of death of American children” (2/28/22) and asking, “How are we supposed to enjoy our childhoods in this country when trauma comes at the speed of a bullet?” (05/24/22). Many of the tweets around the age of younger victims are to mourn, or to recognize that the loss of their life was entirely preventable by gun control.

MFOL also uses anger and outrage, signaled by harsh language and direct callouts of politicians. For example, MFOL tweeted “on today’s episode of “what the fuck is wrong with this country” over a retweeted video of a person threatening to bring a gun to school if their child was required to wear a mask as part of COVID-19 policy (01/21/22). Other examples of anger and outrage are the common use of #NotOneMore, established after the Parkland shooting, and references to X Gonzales’ “We Call B.S.” speech in 2018: “People are still trying to silence us, telling us how to sound, how to act, who we should and shouldn’t call out. Four years later, we

continue to call B.S. @callmeX” (02/17/22). By using poignant and specifically chosen language to tell the stories of victims and survivors, March for Our Lives brings out emotions of sadness, regret, guilt, and outrage in the everyday person. The organization also uses this language in its mission statement, policy plans, and in interactions with the media.

Finally, the most common way that March for Our Lives frames gun violence is through their public shaming of American politicians. One of the ways that MFOL publicly shames politicians is through counter-rhetoric, or arguments that delegitimize oppositional logic and values, or use them in a satirical way. In one example, March for Our Lives uses the very common sentiment of “thoughts and prayers to the families of the victims” which politicians often use as a form of performative and public care, without having to take direct action to solve the issue. March for Our Lives uses #ThoughtsAndPrayers as a tagline in tweets which ask politicians to prove that they care through taking political action: “Your morning reminder that our elected officials’ #ThoughtsAndPrayers lead to more Americans in body bags” (04/04/22). Attached to that tweet is a protest action that March for Our Lives recently took, where they placed more than 1000 body bags on the national mall, forming the words “Thoughts and Prayers”. Each body bag included represented 150 American deaths from gun violence during President Biden’s term. This action specifically highlights the common feeling that politicians’ thoughts and prayers do absolutely nothing to stop gun violence or to help the victims of gun violence: “Our hearts are utterly and completely broken. You can’t stop a bullet with thoughts and prayers. To honor those lost and save countless lives, we need action. We’re dying while we wait for it” (05/24/22).

Another form of counter-rhetoric is the Shock Market, or a campaign that March for Our Lives has launched with Change the Ref and Guns Down America. This campaign is a satirical

portrayal of American politics' emphasis on the importance of the economy and the stock market, as improving the economy is a crowd-pleasing item on political platforms:

Our politicians have an obsession with the markets.

Introducing #ShockMarket. Gun deaths are up, injuries by guns are up, mass shootings are up, every-f**king-thing is up except politicians taking action.

These market trends can't be ignored. (02/14/22).

Every day, updated statistics on gun violence are on the website, with actionable demands for President Biden and other American politicians to take to stop gun violence. On the top of the website, there is a running ticker, like those used in finance, which indicates the direction of gun violence (up or down) and the number of lives lost in each state. March for Our Lives, Change the Ref, and Guns Down America are taking the traditional emphasis on the importance of the economy in politics and applying it to gun violence in the hopes that this will influence the government to act.

March for Our Lives will also directly tag politicians in tweets, asking them outright what actions are being taken to prevent gun violence. Other tweets in which politicians are directly tagged include ones with statistics regarding gun violence during their terms, saying directly to pro-gun control politicians that they have failed the people who put them in office. In this way, medicalization of gun violence interacts with public shaming in politicians. The statistics themselves are also often focused on child victims, which provokes the most emotion in their greater audiences. An example of shaming American politicians which interacts directly with youth culture is by giving politicians “report cards” based on their actions taken regarding gun violence. On April 8, 2022, March for Our Lives, in collaboration with organizations Guns Down America and Change the Ref, released a “Gun Violence Prevention Report Card” for

President Joe Biden, tagging President Biden in the tweet. “Classes” listed on this report card each included a grade assigned by MFOL activists:

Investing in Communities to Reduce Gun Violence: 85%

Fundamentals of Stopping Firearm Trafficking: 33%

Urging Congress to Enact Life-Saving Legislation: 50%

Regulating Untraceable Guns: 80%

The Importance of the Presidential Bully Pulpit: 55%

Modeling Gun-Safety Policies for States: 100%

Overall, President Biden was assigned a 67% (or a D+) in his approach to ending gun violence in the eyes of MFOL, Guns Down America, and Change the Ref. They also included another very recognizable phrase for young people: “room for improvement”, commonly used on report cards with grades below a C that indicates a lack of effort put into schoolwork. Providing a report card for a prominent adult politician connects back to the ages of MFOL activists and centers schools as a symbol of main targets of gun violence. A report card functions as a reminder that school-age children and teens are the most at risk for gun violence.

Through medicalization, emotion, and the public shaming of American politics, March for Our Lives is framing gun violence. Their campaigns are successful in reminding American politicians that victims of gun violence are often young people, most visibly in schools, and that gun violence happens every day. The medicalization of gun violence aims to create a more neutral stance on those involved in gun violence incidents, while using emotion brings public attention to the lives lost. By shaming American politicians, March for Our Lives highlights that their agenda is the priority over a politician’s career and that they are willing to do what they can to ensure that gun violence is ended.

GoodKids MadCity: Framing for Community Peace

GoodKids MadCity approaches the framing of gun violence differently than March for Our Lives. The frames of GoodKids MadCity decentralize gun violence, utilize restorative and transformative justice, and emphasize community support through an independence- and identity-based perspective. They also frame gun violence activism through an intersectionality perspective, centering the most oppressed individuals and critiquing activists who ignore those identities.

The decentralization of gun violence in order to frame it is a unique frame for GoodKids MadCity to use. Through decentralizing gun violence, GKMC can illustrate how systemic racism and structural inequality cause a variety of problems. Gun violence is just one form of violence in the South Side due to poor support systems and neglect from government entities:

WHEN WILL WE HAVE PEACE?! YOUTH IN CHICAGO EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE EVERYDAY! ITS VIOLENT WHEN A CHILD GOES TO SLEEP AND WAKES UP HUNGRY! BEING YOUNG AND UNHOUSED IS VIOLENT! LIVING IN POVERTY IS VIOLENT! BEING 13 AND KILLED BY CPD IS VIOLENT!
(emphasis in original, 04/16/21).

While GKMC is an anti-gun violence organization, it also functions as a peace organization, fully working to solve all types of violence in Chicago. To combat violence in their community, they address housing and food insecurity, resource deprivation, and mental health issues. GKMC sees violence as a symptom of state-sanctioned reinforcement of inequality rather than a root cause of other issues:

Violence isn't happening in a vacuum, it's connected to the hyper segregation, concentrated poverty, 100 plus years [of] police brutality & gang culture dating back to the 1900's like the Hamburg's that Mayor Dailey Sr was a member of! There is real recompense that Chicago owes! (7/22/21)

While decentralizing gun violence may seem counter-productive to ending gun violence, this type of frame draws attention to gun violence as one part of a bigger issue. By focusing on housing insecurity, mental health, poverty, and unemployment in addition to gun violence, GKMC is attempting to address issues in the whole community. This is opposite to how MFOL frames gun violence. Where MFOL frames gun violence as a main issue in all communities, GKMC frames gun violence as one of many issues in one community. Decentralizing gun violence is a successful choice for local anti-gun violence groups, as being part of the community is core to GoodKids MadCity.

Restorative justice is a key frame when it comes to violence in GoodKids MadCity's community. GKMC's Peace Book Ordinance centers restorative justice and transformative justice to encourage peace in their neighborhood. Restorative justice is a different approach to dealing with crime that includes "apologies, restitution, and acknowledgements of harm and injury, as well as to other efforts to provide healing and reintegration of offenders into their communities, with or without additional punishment" (Menkel-Meadow 2007, p. 10.2). Restorative justice aims to reduce the stigma around being a criminal and to rehabilitate individuals that commit crimes through reparations to the community for their wrongdoing. By involving all people who were harmed by the wrongdoing, the community can come together to forgive the individual and work towards their rehabilitation. The permanent taboo of having a previous conviction or being a criminal is no longer relevant, because of previously agreed-on reparations to the community. The community does not suffer lasting effects of the crime due to the community service provided by the individual to fix the damage they caused.

For GoodKids MadCity, restorative justice is directly linked to transformative justice, or providing healing for those who commit violence, harm, or abuse without creating more

violence, harm, or abuse, which includes imprisonment and rough treatment at the hands of police. Essentially, transformative justice and restorative justice work together to address crime, heal the community, and provide support to the person who committed the crime to address the root cause of the problem. For example, providing mental health or physical health support for someone with a drug addiction or assistance in obtaining employment for someone so desperate for money that they committed a robbery. With restorative and transformative justice resources in place, police presence would no longer be needed and money that is funding the police can then go to the communities themselves. For GoodKids MadCity, restorative justice is a solution to gun violence as well as other types of violence in the community:

We understand that the way to ending #GunViolence is to forge a path towards healing, peace building, restorative justice & meeting people's material needs through housing & food security. The #PeaceBook is about decriminalization & getting resources to the streets! #DefundCPD (9/10/21).

GoodKids MadCity agrees that police violence is a form of violence that commonly occurs in their community. Through restorative justice, the need for a heavy police presence would also be reduced. By defunding the Chicago Police Department and redistributing those resources, neighborhoods like Englewood would be able to utilize that funding for restorative justice practices and other community supports.

In connection with the decentralization of gun violence and restorative justice is the emphasis that GKMC places on community support. In focusing on holistically helping the community, GoodKids MadCity emphasizes that community members must provide mutual aid and support. The rationale behind this is based on the consistent disappointment by local officials in providing resources to solve these problems:

“When we say we need free mental health care, free drug treatment, community led centers, restorative justice hubs, real economic investment, green spaces, housing & food

security, fucking listen to us! Having these things will drastically reduce gun violence in #Chicago!” (7/22/21).

Instead of listening to community members, many officials merely throw more money at police to solve problems like housing insecurity and poverty, increasing both the chances for police violence and the criminalization of poor Black and Brown individuals in their neighborhoods.

The Mutual Aid campaign is one that GoodKids MadCity uses to collect donations towards a fund that provides to those who need it in the community. Additionally, the Mutual Aid campaign encourages individuals in the community to share resources and care for each other during difficult times. For example, during a week of severe weather in Chicago, GKMC tweeted out to care for others in their community:

We damn near had a tornado touch down tonight & tomorrow they’ll be a serious heat wave. Please check on your Elders & our most vulnerable. Share this widely with #Chicago & help out if you can to share water or a safe space for community to cool of (6/13/22).

The next day, the heat wave struck the city of Chicago. GoodKids MadCity then tweeted out the locations of some cooling centers around the city as well as an encouragement to help each other:

Just learned that in 1995 in #Chicago over 700 people died from a heat wave! Please check in on people, provide water & shelter if you can, give out fruit & other #MutualAid if you’re able too. We keep us safe! (06/14/22).

GKMC’s use of “we keep us safe!” directly highlights both the lack of confidence in city officials to care for their community and the emphasis on community-driven sufficiency to solve problems and care for one another. GoodKids MadCity was able to provide encouragement for community independence through concrete actions people in the community could take to help each other, like checking on elders and providing water and fruit to those in need. The Mutual

Aid campaign is a way for the community of Englewood to independently solve issues and encourage peace through resource sharing.

Finally, GoodKids MadCity also critiques gun violence activism which does not use an intersectional perspective to center marginalized identities. For example, they refer to protests downtown as “circus parades” that are regulated by CPD (Chicago Police Department), seeing these protests as shows that are put on to illustrate personal anger without taking action to solve any of the problems:

No more circus parades aka protest downtown! Materially support Black & Brown hoods impacted by State violence! If community led uprisings/insurrections happen, post bonds, give mutual aid & jail support & again help get resources to those who are marginalized! #DefundCPD (05/19/22).

Many of the Black and Brown people who are most affected by gun violence (which includes police violence) do not necessarily have the time, resources, or ability to participate in these “circus parades”. Instead of participating in these police-regulated protests, GKMC emphasizes how people who truly want to help solve these issues should donate directly to the groups suffering the most from this issue or contribute to the Mutual Aid campaign in any way they can. Additionally, GoodKids MadCity critiques activists who demand gun regulation without significant reforms to US policymaking as well: “If you’re really for peace and ending #GUNviolence then you would also be anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchy, and anti-colonialism! Calling for an end to gun violence in the states while ignoring American defense contractors making billions in arms deals!” (04/11/22). To build on this, they also critique gun regulation activists for advocating for further criminalization of Black and Brown people in their communities. This directly reflects how the experiences of GoodKids MadCity

influence their perspectives on policy changes and community support when it comes to ending violence.

DIGITAL MEDIA AND GUN VIOLENCE ACTIVISM

Each organization was able to convey their organizational values and framing of gun violence through their digital media presence on Twitter and through the language used on their websites. The difference in using social media compared to traditional websites to convey this information is in the use of pop culture, social media trends, and a variety of different types of digital media that all appeal to younger audiences. For example, being of a similar age and using Twitter and TikTok as their main platforms allowed for both groups to utilize familiar memes, trends, slang, and pop culture references to communicate with their intended demographics.

Social Media Trends and Slang

Both organizations were able to utilize social media trends and language that appeals to younger generations on their Twitter pages. GoodKids Madcity mainly utilized vernacular slang that would appeal to their intended audience of young people of color living in Chicago. March for Our Lives, on the other hand, utilized nationwide social media trends such as memes and jokes that appeal to young people in general.

GoodKids MadCity used a lot of slang in their tweets that appealed directly to young people and people of color, their intended constituents in Chicago. One example of slang that GKMC uses often is “cap” and “no cap”. “Cap” and “no cap” mean “lie” and “no lie” in AAVE and is now being used in mainstream young person slang. For example, GKMC tweeted about Chicago Public Schools on 02/02/22:

Students Ion feel safe going..
 #CPS (cuts them off) cap
 Students naw frfr I ain't finna go to school when..
 #CPS cap
 Students G stop playing ofn grave.
 #CPS cap
 Students organize a walkout to protest safety concerns about #COVID19
 #CPS NO CAP!!!
 Students 🌧️❄️
 #CPS CAP!

In this tweet, GoodKids MadCity is simulating a conversation between students and Chicago Public Schools around feelings of safety in school. In the tweet, students try to make it clear to CPS that they do not feel safe in schools but are immediately cut off with accusations of lies. The students then again attempt to say they will not go to school due to safety concerns and are once again cut off. The students then get frustrated with CPS and organize a walkout surrounding COVID-19 concerns, which CPS finally hears. However, students are still frustrated by the lack of support by CPS. In response, the students freeze out CPS, resulting in CPS further ignoring student concerns. All this information is conveyed through tone, slang, and emojis, which visually represent the freezing out by students of CPS.

Another example of the use of slang by GoodKids MadCity is on June 24, 2020, when they tweeted “Only Chicago organizers call in to a zoom meeting & get it bussin!

😂🤔🙏👏👏👏👏👏 I'm dead G, we love to see it!! Y'all did that @StuStrikeBack

@AssataDaughters #PoliceFreeSchools!” In this tweet, they celebrate how the zoom meeting was like a good party because of the Chicago organizers having a good time while getting work done. “I'm dead G, we love to see it!!” shows that GKMC are laughing about their own behavior and how they love to see Black joy in organizing. By “Y'all did that”, they are recognizing the work that was put into the meeting in addition to the good time that organizers had.

March for Our Lives utilizes social media trends that appeal to the sense of humor and outrage that interacts in participatory forms of politics in the 2020s. For example, using common meme formats to highlight issues in American politics. In one tweet, with the caption “midnight meme”, a two-panel image is posted. The first image is a man labeled “Americans” going to slap some tape over a giant hole spouting water. The hole with water coming out is labeled “a country with the highest gun ownership per capita and 57x more school shootings than other major countries combined”. The second image is a picture of the hand with tape over the hole, labeled “more guns” (05/26/22). In this meme, MFOL is conveying the futility of putting tape over a giant whole spouting water, like the futility of using more guns to solve gun violence in America.

A second example would be when Twitter permanently suspended the account of Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene. March for Our Lives tweeted “Don’t let the door hit ya on the way out @mtgreene” and added a photo of a dial labeled “OOF SIZE” set to Large, with a transparent person mouthing “oof” as an overlay (01/02/22). This conveys the fact that Greene’s behavior on social media resulted in a permanent ban, being embarrassing or an “oof”. The size indicator shows how embarrassing the behavior was—in this case, very embarrassing. Each of these visual components are funny and appealing to younger audiences without lessening the impact and alarm that MFOL has about the current state of gun violence in America. The balance of humor and political satire is easily done by younger activists due to their immersion in the Internet and the deep understanding of how younger people will pick up on tone in media.

The use of meme trends and slang by activists illustrates their ability to judge tone, meaning, and implied symbolism of these trends and language because of their age. Through utilizing current trends and slang that only specific audiences would understand, GKMC and

MFOL are able to connect more deeply with their intended constituency in a way that feels natural and friendly to their audiences. A major way that both organizations connect to their intended audiences is by leaning into digital media diversity to convey emotion, thoughts, and feelings.

Conveying Organizational Values Through Digital Media Diversity

One of the most interesting results from this study was how digital media diversity is increasing in popularity. With the rise of TikTok, text-only social media posts are losing popularity to posts with visual and even audial content in addition to text. Visual and audial content can be used to convey specific and nuanced emotion, categorize content, and relate to experiences of younger people and their social interaction on the Internet.

The inclusion of visual aids like emojis, infographics, photos of current events, or reaction images is an increasingly common way to convey emotion and tone. For example, the use of certain images to convey emotion. MFOL retweeted a news article from CBS News that said, “In one week, fishermen across Florida reel in 2 rifles—and a human body”. In this case, MFOL used the image of recognizable cartoon characters from childhood shows, adding a photo of Dora and Boots from *Dora the Explorer* looking very concerned to this retweet. The caption was only “ummmm...” but the emotion of concern and mild alarm was conveyed through the facial expressions of Dora and Boots (02/01/22). Using images to convey emotion is a common practice among younger people on social media. These images become symbolic of the emotional reaction to different news, and the images are very nuanced in the emotion they convey and the tone that is picked up by consumers of this content.

GKMC uses visual aids as well to convey emotion, relying on emojis instead of on attached images. For example, they often use the fire emoji 🔥 to represent something that is

amazing, like an action taken by one of their activists (6/21/22) or the snowing and snowflake emoji to represent cold behavior ❄️ (02/02/22). GKMC also often uses the combination of the green heart, red heart, and black heart (💚💔🖤) to show Black joy, pride, and love shared on social media (6/20/22). These hearts are sometimes combined with a Black fist emoji 🖊️ and Black praying hands emoji 🙏 to show Black power and blessings (6/20/22). They use the purple heart 💜 and dove emoji 🕊️ in many tweets mourning victims of gun violence to show how necessary peace is in their communities (3/19/22, 2/14/22, 11/15/21, 11/10/21). The emotion that is conveyed through these emojis differs based on the combination of emojis used, the number of repeated or singular emojis in the combination, and the accompanying text directly next to the emojis.

Hashtags were originally introduced to social media to track trending topics on Twitter, showing what individuals are talking about. Hashtags were then commonly used in hashtag activism, or the use of hashtags to bring awareness to a certain issue. Both March for Our Lives and GoodKids MadCity utilized hashtag activism, using #MarchForOurLives and #PeaceBookNow respectively. #MarchForOurLives was used to categorize thoughts about the anti-gun violence organization by both members and non-members, to post images of protests and signs that were made, and to have discussions around why gun control is needed. #PeaceBookNow is used to show violence that is happening in Chicago, often accompanied by text of solutions that the Peace Book Ordinance would provide for this violence. However, the use of hashtags in social media is changing from categorization and tracking topics. Currently, the use of trending hashtags on TikTok and Twitter is to increase non-follower content views. By increasing the number of hashtags, more people are likely to see content, so many content

creators use trending hashtags in addition to descriptors of the content itself. On TikTok, there are different ways to categorize types of content, such as utilizing specific audios.

On TikTok, audios are sometimes reserved for specific issues or specific types of videos—what hashtags were intended for on social media. Audial components of posts being integral to understanding the content completely is a recent development in social media. TikTok specifically leaned into audio synching and common audios for people to use rather than just including the audio of the video itself like on YouTube. Audios on TikTok are often signifiers of common types of issues or provide specific structure to content.

For example, there are specific sounds that are used by March for Our Lives to connect with TikTok users about gun violence. One of these is a clip from the song “Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!” sung by Frank Sinatra. The clip is “Oh the weather outside is frightful, but the fire is...mmmm, delightful!”. Users put a text description of a pleasant thought over the first half, then lip synch the “mmm delightful” to show the good feelings they get from the thought. For example, March for Our Lives put the text “Thinking of all the NRA backed politicians we’re voting out in 2022”, implying that this thought is delightful to them. Another example of this is an audio saying, “We’re all gonna be safe and we’re all gonna have a great time.... What the Jesus Christ was that!” Essentially, this audio is used as someone walking into a situation, thinking the situation is a good, safe time. The person then pauses off screen and returns with a horrified face, in synch with “What the Jesus Christ was that” as a response to something alarming which immediately changed their understanding of the situation. This audio was used to illustrate the victory of a gun control bill passing in Congress (“We’re all gonna be safe and we’re all gonna have a great time”) followed immediately by the Supreme Court of the United States repealing *Roe v. Wade* and reproductive healthcare (“What the Jesus Christ was that”).

These audios are used not only to address gun violence, but have a designated structure based on the audio which conveys meaning and familiarity to the individuals watching it. Through using viral audios, activists can create content that is easily digestible and relatable to their audience.

The evolution of social media results in less explicitly stated content and more implied through a deep background knowledge of internet culture that interacts with current trends, pop culture, and shared experiences online. Like the subtle nuances of body language, young people can pick up on the smallest implied meanings in visual, auidial, and textual posts. Because they grew up with social media, memes, and trends, these activists can use that subtle ability to convey meaning. By using diverse digital media, common trends on social media, slang, and pop culture, GoodKids MadCity and March for Our Lives can better connect with their intended audiences.

CONCLUSION

This project utilized an inhabited institutionalism framework to highlight how youth-led organizations function on different levels. Through an analysis of social media content and official webpage content, I was able to highlight differences in the way that each organization approached interaction with young people online. In comparing these organizations, I was able to contribute further to literature on youth activism, social movement organizations, and digital media studies. Through the introduction of visual and audial data, I was also able to share the nuances of social media posting that young people can easily recognize and understand.

By analyzing local and national youth-led anti-gun violence organizations and the ways they engage with youth culture in the digital space, I was able to highlight differences between them on the local and national level. Group composition, goals of the organizations, framing, and use of digital media illustrated differences in the way that March for Our Lives and GoodKids MadCity interact with their intended constituency. GoodKids MadCity focuses on young people of color living in Chicago who emphasize peace, community support, restorative justice, and ending all types of violence in their communities. March for Our Lives looks for nationwide activists who can work within the current political system and emphasize gun ownership regulation and creating a cultural shift in understanding gun violence. The scale that each organization functions on is very different, as are the resources available and strategies taken. However, collaboration between the two groups has been beneficial for both groups—and both groups stem from a lack of advocacy on their behalf by adults and a refusal by politicians to listen to young people. The two groups also share the unique position of being young activists

immersed in the digital space, social media, and constant connectedness. By combining their constant connectedness with the experiences on gun violence, informed policy, goals, and solutions to gun violence are defined and shared. The sense of responsibility and outrage that each group has is based on different experiences, but results in similar goals and collaboration.

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VITA

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After the completion of her Master's degree, Szamocki will be continuing at Loyola University Chicago as a PhD student in Sociology. She plans to build on her Master's Thesis for her Dissertation.