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MARCH FOR OUR LIVES

Generation Z's Tweeting Thumbs and Marching Feet

A study of how the 'March for Our Lives' student activists' discursive solidarity on Twitter strives to achieve gun control by mobilising and politicising American youth

Amanda Danielle Flint

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School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds

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Abstract

The 'Never Again' movement, also known as the 'March for Our Lives' (MFOL), is the first notable statement about gun violence made by Americans born after 1999. On February 14th, 2018, a former student murdered 17 people at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS) in Parkland, Florida. After Congress failed to ban assault rifles, survivors vocalised their dissent on Twitter. The students' activism has disrupted the liberal democratic tradition of rational deliberation in the public sphere by circulating a solidary discourse of anger, empathy, hope, passion and humour. While this research is framed around a particular protest against gun violence, it contributes to academic debates about the public sphere, social media, emotion and young people's political participation. Content analysis and a Foucauldian multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) examine how a coalition of high school students endeavours to mobilise Generation Z within a digitally-equipped private sphere, subsequently engendering political action in a counter-public sphere resistant to dominant discourses. The activists' tweets incorporate several performative, linguistic devices to communicate an informal, discursive solidarity. By operating in tandem with Twitter as a conduit of emotion, it disrupts the rational public sphere and advances the political participation needed to sustain a youth-led social movement.

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1. Introduction

On February 14th, 2018, a 19-year-old gunman entered Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS) in Parkland, Florida with a legally purchased AR-15 assault rifle. Firing 400 rounds per minute, the assailant murdered 14 students, three staff members and injured 17 others. Surpassing the 1999 Columbine High School massacre which claimed the lives of 13 people, the Parkland shooting is the deadliest ever at a high school in United States history. Rather than passively mourning their losses and accepting the massacre's inevitable disappearance from the news agenda, the next day, several survivors appeared on the media to demand immediate gun reform, intensifying the contentious, nation-wide gun debate and ultimately sparking a social movement.

Initially organised by sophomore Cameron Kasky, the 'Never Again' movement started with several students congregating on his living room floor, organising trips to the Florida State Capitol to advocate for gun control (Barnitt et al., 2018). They devised the #Never Again hashtag in order to create a shared political reality with their Generation Z peers (individuals born between 1994 and 2010) and to ensure the media's attention remained on Parkland (Morales, 2018). After several hours, #NeverAgain was trending at number two on Twitter (Barnitt, et al., 2018). Their social media activism prompted spin-off movements such as the 'National School Walkout' on March 14th, 2018, in which thousands of students walked out of their classrooms in a countrywide demonstration of solidarity. 'Never Again' shortly resulted in the historic 'March for Our Lives' (MFOL) protest on March 24th, 2018 in Washington DC, with over 800,000 marchers in attendance (Kosoff, 2018). The movement soon surpassed Parkland, becoming an inclusive, nation-wide platform for all young citizens affected by gun violence, encouraging their participation in a counter-public sphere in order to eradicate this endemic, uniquely American problem.

The interactive propensity of Web 2.0 technology has allowed for more horizontally configured social movement organisations, enabling a greater number of internet users within the private sphere to engage in offline, collective action networks (Fenton, 2016). This dissertation is therefore keen to understand how the MFOL activists' emotional, discursive solidarity on Twitter activates the agencies of young people within their sequestered private spheres, motivating them to participate politically in a counter-public sphere of on-the-ground activism (Fraser, 1992). The virtual architecture of Twitter propagates a digital culture dependent on the circulation of informal, emotional and disruptive language linked to the private sphere; an adversarial discourse to the liberal democratic tradition of rationality concomitant of the public sphere (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; Habermas, 1962). This blurring of the private and public realms reinforces the "personal as political" ideology, transforming individual experience into a public, shared reality (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.78). In turn, the students' use of discursive solidarity democratises public deliberation by incorporating the politicised perspectives of young people (Kulynych, 2001).

A mixed-methods approach consisting of a content analysis and Foucauldian, multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) permits an examination of the underlying power structures evident in the students' lexical and iconographical choices, as well as a consideration of the prevalence of certain types of tweets intended to advance political solidarity. As power is ultimately embedded in discourse (Foucault, 2002), this analytic undertaking aims to examine the ways in which an emotionally discursive solidarity disseminated by a group of teenage, mass-shooting survivors manages to encourage the transition of youth political participation from a private sphere to a counter-public sphere of resistance, while also subverting the powerful rhetoric of a Republican, NRA-affiliated legislature. This counter-publicity of antagonistic language and protest is an "act of resistance" in itself (Fenton, 2016, p.59), as it destabilises the legitimacy of authoritative,

institutional power, subsequently weakening power relations (Foucault, 1982). Although this research is framed empirically by a particular protest against gun violence, the MFOL case study contributes to several broader scholarly debates warranting its analysis, notably academic deliberation about the public sphere, social media, emotion and young people's political participation.

Conventionally, MCDA is used to analyse the discourses of elite individuals and institutions exercising power over subordinate groups. Excluding the 'Indignados', 'Arab Spring' and 'Occupy' movements of the 2010s, little academic study, if any, is devoted to analysing the online, discursive solidarity of the Generation Z-led, anti-establishment movement against gun violence, and how such discourse intends to inspire youth political participation. This research refutes techno-optimistic accounts stressing the "almighty power of social media as a means of collective action" (Tufte, 2017, p.82) and argues Twitter does not function within an alternative cyber-space as a solitary arbiter of social movements (Shirky, 2011; Castells, 2009). Instead, it *complements* the pre-existing manifestations of solidarity and collective identity serving as critical "pre-conditions" for communal action, doing so as a conduit of disruptive, emotional discourse intended to mobilise young people in their private realms before transitioning to a counter-public of protest resulting in tangible, social change (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.13). Consistently misrepresented by adults, young people are altering what was once a private realm of concealment and depoliticisation into a site for mobilisation, culminating in a counter-public sphere of resistance encouraging political participation. By advocating for their own interests in terms of gun control, these activists are countering young people's political disenfranchisement, subsequently refuting a generational stereotype characterizing youth as politically disinterested (Loader et al., 2014). To understand how the MFOL activists mobilise their peers and subvert power relations via

Twitter in order to effectuate offline political change, this dissertation aims to address the following research questions:

1. How has the student activists' discursive solidarity attempted to mobilise young citizens within their private spheres, and in turn, encourage their political participation in a resistant counter-public sphere of on-the-ground activism?

2. In what ways has the student activists' discursive solidarity advocating gun reform managed to subvert the hegemonic, dominant discourses of the Republican-majority government, National Rifle Association (NRA) and media?

2. Generation Z as Networked, Politicised and Disruptive Citizens

The literature review provides a theoretical overview of the public sphere, the transformation of the private sphere, and subaltern counter-publics. Discussion about young people's use of social media and the roles of solidarity and emotion in motivating the political participation of people in social movements will be addressed. To comprehend how a solidary discourse facilitates collective action and the subversion of hegemonic, discursive power, a review of Foucauldian power relations shall inform this analysis. Lastly, outlining the contextual significance of the MFOL movement and prior scholarship about the mediatisation of school-shootings is vital to this research.

a. Critiques of the Public Sphere

The public sphere is a universal space of "everyday living" (Fairclough, 2003, p.44) facilitating the deliberation of social and political matters of common-concern among citizens, either through face-to-face interactions or the media (Dahlgren, 2009). Livingstone (2005) argues political discussion among publics develops civic identities, enabling the transition from a private realm into a public one. Habermas's (1962) notion of how the public sphere should function is informed by liberal democracy. In his historical account of the rise and fall of the public sphere in European bourgeoise society, he proposes a normative ideal for participation in public life. Habermas states governments must be held accountable via rational and objective public discussion, in which individuals are scrutinised solely on the quality of their arguments, not by their social positioning (Habermas, 1962). However, this ideal implies subjective argument and emotional appeals are detrimental to deliberation in the public sphere (Kulynych, 2001). Wahl-Jorgensen (2019, p.25) argues this idealistic commitment to rationality and contempt for "undesirable emotional subjectivity" is incongruent with lived, social realities, and fails to account for the ways in which citizens actively appreciate and identify with the experiences of others (Benhabib, 1992). The liberal

democratic excision of emotion from deliberation to secure partisan consensus is dependent on an "oversimplified view of the political" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.26). Instead, subjective discourse should be valued, as its affective forces constitute the "collective forms of identification" found in the contemporary field of politics (Mouffe, 2005; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.26).

Although Habermas's (1962) normative ideal prioritises the principle of rational discussion guaranteeing accessibility to all, in practice, this idealisation is compromised. It is difficult to comprehend how a prerequisite of equality can be obtained simply through discussion (Edgar, 2006; Dahlgren, 2009). In reality, the public sphere is seen as exclusionary of subordinate groups, prioritising the discourses of male, property-owning citizens (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). According to Kohn (2000, p.417), dialogue cannot determine its own preconditions; equality and reciprocity are therefore conditional, and must be "fought for, rather than assumed". Critics of Habermas's public sphere contend his earlier conception does not account for the dismissal of passionate solidarity and actively excludes the discourses of women, minorities and dependants (Fraser, 1992; Fenton, 2016; Mouffe, 2005; Cohen, 2009). This preference for dominant discourses neutralises power relations, suppressing the stratified, emotional circumstances in which they arise, and diminishes the credibility of other discursive styles (Tufte, 2017).

To address the limitations of the public sphere, scholars proposed a model of counter-publics as subsidiary spheres where subordinated social groups could communicate counter-discourses and invent "oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Negt and Kluge, 1972; Fraser, 1992, p.123). Rather than eliminate the realities of inequality and power relations, counter-publics incorporate them as useful determinants of the present issues informing public debate (Tufte, 2017). Failing to consider the complexities of modern liberal democracy, Habermas's unitary, historical account neither addresses the plurality of

public spheres in bourgeoise society, nor the value of social movements (Fenton, 2016). According to Calhoun (1992, p.27), movements propel socio-political issues on to the public agenda and support the legitimisation of subjugated voices. The critiques made about the public sphere resulted in its subsequent revision; in *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas (1992) acknowledges the multiple, nuanced spaces within the public sphere, and argues, for deliberative democracy to flourish in society, public discussion must reflect all relevant voices and interests. In doing so, he embraces "the contested nature of public life", and recognises the diverse identities co-existing among multiple, deliberative sites (Goldfarb, 2018, p.120).

i.   The 'New' Private Sphere

Although the private sphere is traditionally viewed as an intimate site devoted to the maintenance of the home, family, and, relevant to this study, the preservation of childhood (Arendt, 1958; Kulynych, 2001), Papacharissi (2010, p.138) argues the 'new' private sphere on the internet is the "new nexus" of sociality and public engagement. While it is associated with being left alone, it is also a space inhabited by counter-publics of marginalised discourses, blurring the distinction between private and public. Furthermore, it is a site for political self-discovery where the networked young citizen can emerge in public space while still maintaining the "autonomy and self-expressional capabilities of the private sphere" (Papacharissi, 2010, p.139). Social media contributes to the circulation of political issues in young people's private spheres, ultimately encouraging them towards participation in counter-publics of political protest. These privately contained, publicly oriented activities occur "within the locus of a digitally-equipped, private sphere", allowing to emerge a "networked, yet *privé* sociality" (Papacharissi, 2010, p.21). As newer civic habits continue to manifest in online spaces, Papacharissi (2010) implies all civic activities in contemporary

democracy originate from the private sphere; hence, net-based technologies contribute to the sociability of individuals within their personal space.

The perception of youth as politically disaffected is a consensus among contemporary academics (Delli Carpini, 2000; Papacharissi, 2010, Fenton, 2016). Politically apathetic youth are said to contribute to a decline in worldwide political participation, hindering democratic citizenship. While millennials and Generation Z citizens are the second largest voter demographic after Boomers, just 16 percent voted in the 2014 U.S. midterms, a decline from 21 percent in 1986 (Kaplan, 2018). Loader provides an alternative argument about the lacking political interest among young citizens. His "cultural displacement" perspective (Loader, 2007, p.2) suggests young people have not forgone an affiliation with politics; rather, the dismissal of their concerns has created a contemporary political sphere sympathetic to the discourses of adults and dismissive of the interests of those under 18, otherwise known as "semi-citizens" (Cohen, 2009, p.221). This bolsters the paternalistic perspective of young people as immature and vulnerable, whose freedoms must be restricted so their interests may "be better served" by adults (Cohen, 2009, p.224). Processes of cultural displacement began during the Civil Rights and Anti-War demonstrations of the 1960s, inciting a disillusion with party politics prevalent today in youth-led movements against climate change and gun violence (Webster and Vernick, 2013).

Consequently, the politically conscious, young citizens of contemporary society become "politically emancipated" by retreating to a private sphere of reflection and expression (Papacharissi, 2010, p.132). This sanctuary encourages the enhancement of their "individual authenticity and self-actualisation" (Papacharissi, 2010, p.132). Mobilising their peers via social media platforms, they transcend their private spheres, vocalising their discursive solidarity in a counter-public of political protest (Papacharissi, 2010). However, not all individuals wish to partake in physical acts of mobilisation. The private sphere is a

fluid, virtual space, meaning, activist events occurring on a grand scale can be instantly

transmitted and experienced by those in their personal spheres, a process Thompson (1995,

p.137) calls, "despatialised simultaneity". Although the young citizen may witness the protest

alone, she is not disconnected from society. In the private sphere, she establishes civic habits

allowing her to forge connections with people based on cultural, social and political priorities

(Gobetti, 1997; Papacharissi, 2010, p.137). The reorganisation of time and space made

possible by modern communication technologies turns the private sphere of the home into a

simultaneously private and public space; connectivity is realised remotely from any space an

individual deems private. Politically active youth are seen to gravitate towards alternative

political arenas transcending the dominant public sphere, as the influence of family, partisan

politics and educational institutions have had a lesser impact on their political development

(Loader et al., 2014). Papacharissi (2010, p.164) asserts the autonomous private sphere

reconciles the personal and the political, granting mobilised young people the expressive

capabilities, control and ability to collectively subvert authority with like-minded individuals.

However, Arendt (1958) perceives the private sphere as a protective realm of

childhood innovation, arguing limits to a child's freedom are crucial to their maturity into

adulthood. Purdy (1992) supports Arendt's view, claiming young people are unequipped with

the moral virtues and self-control needed to advocate responsibly for themselves. Others

insist children are politically ignorant and more likely to be co-opted by dominant political

forces, contributing to ruinous policy changes (Kulynych, 2001). Furthermore, rights to

participation are based on political interest; while children may have an interest in the right to

life, their concern for the political is argued as inexistent (Kulynych, 2001). However, within

the context of gun violence, American lawmakers' decades of passive responses to mass-

shootings have proven detrimental to a child's right to life; it is therefore argued, a young

person's interest in their own wellbeing is *inextricable* from the political. As children become

more politically active about gun reform within the private sphere, its archaic, restrictive role as an incubator of childhood "fragility" is losing its relevance (Kulynych, 2001, p.242).

ii. Counter-Publics

While counter-publics adopt theoretical aspects from the Habermasian public sphere, its definition as a more inclusive realm of deliberation emerges due to criticism against the latter. A central tenet of Habermas's work is his positive outlook of democracy, stating once citizens have deliberated and arrived at a purely rational consensus, the government will consider their informed views (Habermas, 1992). While he addresses how structural changes led to the creation of the public sphere, he undermines the role of collective action and social movements in its development. Fenton (2016) argues radical activities such as nation-wide boycotts, demonstrations and petitions are essential contributions to the already normative activities of public discussion and debate. These collective activities are executed in "parallel discursive arenas" free from the control of dominant groups, allowing individuals to defend their interests, disseminate counter-discourses and establish widespread, mobilised networks within counter-public spheres (Fraser, 1992, p.64).

This alternative concept of public deliberative space suits radical activity and challenges the rhetoric and authority of the dominant sphere (primarily constituted of governmental institutions and the mass media) as it is synonymous with counter-publicity, representing a departure from the dominant mainstream (Fenton, 2016, p.59). This type of publicity is an act of resistance, driving an alternative political agenda generating greater discursive contestation (Negt and Kluge, 1972). This resistant discourse is crucial to subverting power relationships; Foucault (1982) asserts the exercise of power is inextricable from resistance, thereby making the counter-public sphere an ideal arena for challenging dominant discourses. In turn, the plurality of thought circulating within counter-publics reinforces democracy and becomes an impulse of youth activism (Downey and Fenton,

2003). Multiple counter-publics of participation are remedial solutions to the singular public sphere, as well as the dominance and subordination prevalent among socially stratified societies (Fraser, 1992). This bolster Young's (1997) concept of the "de-centred public sphere"; rather than occurring in one face-to-face forum, deliberation unfolds across multiple diverse sites, between millions of strangers, interconnected to one another over spans of time and space, online or offline.

Benkler (2006) and Jenkins (2006) adopt a techno-optimistic view, claiming networked media has the potential to elicit radical, democratic participation through its interactive networks, allowing social media sites like Twitter to promote greater civic engagement within a pluralistic counter-public sphere. The potential for such mobilisation to actualise into real-life protest conveys the fluidity of social media; a movement can be nascent online but rapidly executed in real-time (Juris, 2012). Yet, their overtly positive account fails to consider the critical necessity of direct leadership. Rather, they argue social media platforms and their spontaneous creation of decentralised, horizontal, leaderless networks are the drivers of social collective action (Castells, 2000; Gerbaudo, 2015; Tufte, 2017). Alternatively, Lievrouw (2011) suggests the most productive social movements are those led by organisers who are able to make rational choices by recognising the organisational, political and economic opportunity structures that ultimately determine a movement's longevity. Finally, Gerbaudo (2015) asserts while social media is a tool facilitating interactivity and participation, it is not a solitary agent of social change; rather, it relies on the emotional investment of its users to form a collective, common identity.

b. **The Networked Young Citizen**

The networked young citizen rejects party politics, generally preferring project-oriented, horizontal modes of political action (Loader et al., 2014). Social media has opened up new channels for political discourses commensurate with youth-related issues and has

introduced a participatory culture nurturing their deliberative skills (Jenkins, 2006; Leadbeater, 2008). As a platform, it constitutes as a source of power by allowing young citizens to participate in public discourse without the limits of time, place or age restriction (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000). Young people are departing from deferential attitudes by gravitating towards more critical and irreverent means of self-actualisation (Bennet et al., 2011). Furthermore, Castells (2009, p.136) argues the "mass communications of the self" actualised by social media enable young citizens to reach millions of individuals at an unprecedented scale and speed, acting as a tool of resistance towards the dominant sphere (Howard and Hussain, 2012; Klein, 2000). While social media may offer alternative opportunities for political participation within private and counter-public spheres, it cannot grant young citizens voting rights. For under-eighteens, age is an obstacle to full political participation within the public sphere (Kulynych, 2001). However, a study conducted by Hart and Atkins (2011) found the capacity of 17-year-olds to vote responsibly was indistinguishable from that of an 18-year-old – the youngest adults eligible to participate electorally. This suggests denying those under the age of 18 the right to vote is arbitrary, and failure to include young voices within the public sphere will undoubtedly hinder deliberative democracy (Kulynych, 2001).

i. Twitter

As a digital-networking agent, Twitter is a visible means of coordination and assemblage, forging solidary relationships between mobilised people online and protestors active across multiple, resistant counter-public spheres (Gerbaudo, 2012). Furthermore, it facilitates collaborative peer production stemming from proactive, supportive leadership, contributing to the stimulation of public action and authentic communal expression (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). The connections made with likeminded individuals on Twitter allows solidarity to flourish, whilst preserving the self-expressive autonomy of the private sphere

(Papacharissi, 2010). Web 2.0 has displaced the once paternalistic view of the private sphere into a networked, "citizen-centred" space connecting various counter-publics (Papacharissi, 2010). No longer a virtual sphere of refuge and escapism, Twitter as an activist tool helps users "re-approach the physical public space" of a counter-public sphere (Fenton, 2008; Gerbaudo, 2012, p.159).

However, Twitter may not be conducive to prolonging effective political intervention. Morozov (2011) argues 'slacktivism' can occur among large groups of supposedly politically active participants. Such inadequate contributions of minor commitment include monetary donations, retweeting a call to action or forming an online group. Furthermore, Gladwell (2010) insists the decentralised, non-hierarchical and superficial ties characteristic of social media are ill-equipped to foster lasting, influential change. Going against Castell's (2015) geographically detached, fluid "network of brains" theory, Gerbaudo (2012) asserts social media is only useful as a means for facilitating physical gatherings and cannot act as a permanent substitute for public space. Such contending arguments question the organisation of power among citizen networks and whether Twitter can truly generate significant political outcomes (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013).

c. Solidarity

Solidarity is an essential component in forming a collective identity and a necessary precondition for sustained political action (Flanagan, 2009). Solidarity does not appear automatically via shared interests with others; rather, it arises from conflict with antagonistic groups as a result of opposing views and interests (Gamson, 1992; Hechter, 1987). Scholz (2008, p.6) argues political solidarity requires morally obligated individuals oriented toward social justice and a commitment to three interrelated modes of morality and obligation:

- To facilitate moral cooperation and mutual understanding, one must have a moral responsibility toward an end goal of political justice.

- One must value the collective alliance's relationship with wider society; this includes those being advocated for and the opposition in support of unjust political systems.

- An obligation to strictly non-violent protest.

These obligations and peaceful approaches to combating injustice result in activist networks characteristic of political solidarity. However, Scholz (2008) contends solidarity cannot be reduced to pure activism, as it is primarily a "moral relation" with emotional and political value encouraging positive action to achieve a collective goal (Scholz, 2008; 2015). By forming a strong, moral commitment to others, a participant's sense of solidarity is strengthened when a 'one of us' mentality can be articulated emotively. Thus, the preservation of consciousness-raising, cooperation and mutuality indicative of solidarity are sustained by expressions of feeling (Bartky, 2002).

i.   Emotion

The role of emotion in creating a "symbolic togetherness" around an issue of mutual concern is a vital part of solidarity, yet, remains a neglected concept in social movement scholarship (Gerbaudo, 2012). Mediated emotions are "politicised interpretations of bodily affect" conveyed discursively via media texts and used as strategic resources for enabling social movements (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.8). Knowingly staged for an intended purpose, they gain their significance from their discursive and performative construction, allowing political action to occur (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Further, the emotional quality of using social media for activism asserts social movement communication is not a result of purely technical factors, but of human organisation (Gerbaudo, 2012). Habermas envisaged the public sphere to privilege formal, dispassionate and disembodied communication, consequently rejecting solidarity networks. Subjective, informal speech that was hopeful, impassioned, witty, sarcastic, humorous, antagonistic, metaphorical or repetitive was considered ineffective and disruptive to public deliberation (Kulynych, 2001, p.258; Fraser

1992). Habermas (1962) argues an objective public is necessary for genuine deliberation to transpire, however, Young (1997) states such generalised, formal speech is routinely employed by the elite members of society used to progress a rhetoric of privilege. Not only are young people denied the right to participate politically in the public sphere, their irreverent attitudes and formations of solidary networks embody the impassioned, subjective speech Habermas deems disruptive and adverse to rational deliberation (Kulynych, 2001, p.259).

Scholz (2008) and Dahlgren (2009) disagree with Habermas's approach, arguing 'disruption' to the deliberative process by expressing the moral discourses of hope and passion are in fact unavoidable and crucial to advancing solidarity, motivating a desire for the "final ends and goals" sustaining political activism (Scholz, 2008, p.79; Dahlgren, 2009). Both emotions connect members by stimulating civic bonds and trust within the cohort as well as strengthening civic identity (Scholz, 2008; Dahlgren, 2009). While both emotions are similar, there are subtle contrasts. Hope is a form of social criticism embodying the idea that "the future is better than the present" and is crucial to keeping the movement alive (Scholz, 2008, p.82). Although it creates a desire for a better world, it is an emotion of pure expectation lacking strategy (Scholz, 2008; 2015). Passion is more pragmatic, consisting of intense enthusiasm, devotion and a communicative urgency directed toward a realistic goal (Dahlgren, 2009, p.85). It involves careful reasoning of how to strive for good and requires one's utter commitment to produce any meaningful effect (Hall, 2005). While liberal democratic theory neglects the connection between reason and passion – conceiving the latter to be disorderly and subjective – rationality always *incorporates* passion when there is a goal to achieve; thus, passion is needed for making political decisions and encouraging political action (Dahlgren, 2009, p.84).

While the formal structure of the public sphere is based upon the delegation of elite representation, social movements rely on direct, emotional engagement and participation (Fenton, 2008). Participation in deliberative democracy is therefore made possible by subjective counter-publics providing forms of reciprocity informed by the "collective experience of marginalisation" (Fenton, 2008, p.38). Tufte (2017, p.137) insists social movements are "experience movements", meaning, political action is only real if it can be felt as an emotional, corporeal experience. Although hope and passion lay the groundwork for discursive solidarity, Scholz's and Dahlgren's limited emotional spectrum fails to reflect the complexities of human emotion. For instance, antagonistic speech encompasses the indignation and frustration of individuals (Hart, 2007). Social movement scholars argue anger is a vital political emotion, as it is an instant reaction to the injustice inflicted on oppressed groups and energises the collective organisation of "disruptive political projects" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.95).

Empathy is an essential prerequisite to collective action as it reinforces one's commitment to a cause by sharing in the plight of others. Social movements secure empathetic bonds with people by evoking pathos through performative storytelling (Bartky, 2002; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Personalised stories provoke empathy, bridging the private and public spheres by enabling creative thinking about our own realities and those of others, transforming private worldviews into "shared realities" of understanding (Koehn, 1998, p.57). Humour frames political protest, operating as a performative tactic to engage audiences and render them more amenable to persuasive language. This boosts the relatability and hence, communality of a social movement (Hart, 2007; Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014). To assess how political solidarity impacts youth-led social movements, analytical openness is necessary to comprehending their lifeworlds, the emotions influencing their engagement within the

private realm, and the subsequent action taken as part of a resistant counter-public sphere (Tufte, 2017).

d. Power Relations

To comprehend how young people mobilise to demand gun control, and in the process, criticise politicians, gun lobbyists and the media for their inaction, an overview of power relations is imperative. The antagonistic language directed towards dominant groups is "socially constitutive" and "socially shaped" as it vocalises the injustices resulting from institutional power (Foucault 1984). Discursive emotional claims must be conceived as regimes of truth closely connected and predicated on power relations (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Discourse is generally positioned in the interests of the dominant structures of society; thus, to subvert hegemonic authorities, it is discourse *itself* that is "the power to be seized" (Foucault, 1984, p.110). The MFOL students' discursive solidarity aims to upend the government's ritualistic, ineffectual response to school-shootings by undermining their power. As Foucault (1982) professes, wherever power is exerted, resistance will always exist. Kulynych (2001) argues political participation is a form of performative resistance; rather than arguing with the legislature, young people resort to informal, sarcastic and antagonistic speech, capitalising on their youthful creativity to weaken state power.

The notion of knowledge upholds relations of power as it represents a group's definitive point of view. According to Foucault (1984, p.29), knowledge as a set of claims "permits and assures the exercise of power". Having endured a mass-shooting at their school, the student activists' first-hand knowledge of their ordeal merits the superiority of their discourse, as lawmakers were not present during the shooting. Known as "I-pistemology" (van Zoonen, 2012, p.57), it is a cultural practice in which waning confidence in official, institutional knowledge has allowed the self to emerge as the "source and arbiter" of all truth and knowledge, derived from one's own memory, personal experiences and feelings. This

declining trust augments the contentious relationship between lawmakers and the MFOL

students, as the former relies on the public's trust and consideration of their policies to be

truthful and relevant (van Zoonen, 2012). Social media networks have become platforms for

the 'I-pistemological' truths of citizens, legitimising their knowledge as valid "sources of

politics" and strategies of power (van Zoonen, 2012, p.62; Foucault, 1982).

e. March for Our Lives

Ever since the Columbine massacre of 1999, mass shootings have become an endemic

fixture of American culture. Representing just 4 percent of the world's population,

Americans account for 45 percent of the world's firearms, and for every 100 citizens, there

are 120 guns (Kellner, 2012). In the last decade, America has suffered more school-shootings

than the rest of the world combined (Muschert and Sumiala, 2012). Studies about school

massacres are abundant, covering the crisis of masculinity (Kellner, 2012), peer

marginalisation (De Venanzi, 2012), performative violence (Schildkraut et al., 2018) and the

news media's role in granting shooter notoriety (Lindgren, 2012). Much of the literature is

informed by mediatised logic, a communication form influencing how audiences respond to

highly-mediated coverage of mass shootings as "victims, victimisers and bystanders"

(Newman, 2004, p.233). In studies examining the newsworthiness of school-shootings,

scholars identified a symbiotic relationship between shooters and the media. The former

requires an audience and public stage, while the latter prefers sensational acts of homicide to

satisfy viewers' fascinations with violence (Duwe, 2004; Jewkes, 2004; Schildkraut et al.,

2018). Other studies have analysed how a shooter's use of social media facilitates the

"symbolic performance" of school-shootings by turning them into "cultural scripts" for

copycats to follow (Larkin, 2009).

While these studies focus on the mediatisation of school-shootings across multiple

media formats, this analysis is concerned with the immediate, collective action of survivors to

demand gun control shortly after the massacre took place. By tweeting vehement calls to action, the MFOL students create their own cultural scripts of solidarity, upending the status quo of politicians' intolerable passivity towards gun legislation. After the Parkland shooting, the students' political demonstrations eclipsed the media's coverage of the shooter, altering the public narrative to one of resilience and proactivity. The movement sparked the affective potential of young people to become *mobilised* within the private sphere and *moralised* by forming resistant counter-publics advocating for stricter gun laws (Chouliaraki, 2004). Due to the recency of the Parkland shooting, empirical study about the Twitter activism of school-shooting victims is virtually non-existent. The few, small-scale studies about the MFOL solely analyse the media's reception of the students' actions (Lombardi, 2018).

The co-founders of MFOL are reversing a generational stereotype classifying Generation Z as politically disinterested. Organised via Twitter, this was the first mass movement led by pre-university students in America. Co-founder Jaclyn Corin stated, "Adults say "get off your phones", but social media is our weapon. Without it, the movement wouldn't have spread this fast" (Bromwich, 2018). By crafting quote tweets intended to ridicule and undermine official power, the Twitter feature promotes transparency by allowing young people to consider the opposition's side (Kosoff, 2018). Yet, their political education offline prevails their proclivity for Twitter. By getting involved in extracurriculars such as debate, theatre and journalism, the students have become well-versed in gun policy, public speaking, media interviews and in mobilising their peers to register and vote in the 2018 midterm elections. For Flanagan (2009), these activities are strong indicators of political participation in adulthood, and when complimented by collective action networks, become crucial motivators of a young person's transition from the private sphere to a counter-public of solidary protest.

3. Methodology

This research takes a mixed methodological approach, integrating content analysis with a Foucauldian MCDA (Bryman, 2012). Together, they provide an in-depth examination of the students' tweets, attempting to answer how their solidary discourse mobilises young people within a private sphere to form a counter-public of resistance, and in the process, challenge authoritative power.

a. Content Analysis

To understand the students' motives, a content analysis will be conducted to provide a comprehensive overview of the tweets. The quantitative procedure is divided into two stages, the first identifying the frequency of the various linguistic techniques used to communicate solidarity, such as personal and possessive pronouns, overlexicalisation, modals, metaphor and symbolism. Stage two investigates the prevalence of certain words or phrases used to categorise the tweets based on who or what is being referenced to and addressed, i.e. young people, dominant groups and the social movement (Appendix A). Although content analysis fragments texts into quantifiable, constituent parts, it brings them together during the interpretation stage to make note of the contexts in which these texts materialise and why (Machin and Hansen, 2013, p.113). Yet, content analysis cannot indicate *what* parts to analyse, nor *how* to assess a text's social significance or latent meanings; to do this, quantification should be supplemented by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). A mixed-methods approach enriches findings and boosts validity by offsetting the weaknesses and capitalising on the strengths of each method, allowing the pursuit of a research question from alternative empirical viewpoints (Bryman, 2012).

In stage 1, the use of personal pronouns determines how the students address or talk about people and how they refer to themselves, while possessive pronouns indicate their connectivity to, and ownership of, particular objects or individuals. While the utility of

pronouns is endless, this dissertation aims to uncover how they contribute to a discourse of

solidarity responsible for youth political participation and the subversion of power relations.

In social movement ideologies, personal and possessive pronouns forge a clear distinction

between *us* and *them*, or *we* and *they*, in which *us* and *we* underline the good characteristics

of the speaker and provide a sense of collectivity. To contrast, th*ey* and *them* highlight the

negativity of oppressive groups (Beard, 2000). Possessive words like *my* and *our* establish

connections of ownership and solidarity. Overlexicalisation provides over-persuasion and

emphasis, while modality creates predictions of outcomes, generates commitment to a shared

goal, and establishes identity, as people identify themselves by what they "commit to in a

text" (Fairclough, 2003, p.164). Metaphor and symbolism craft memorable, persuasive

interpretations of how we should conceive the world, and often conceal power relations

(Machin and Mayr, 2012).

The second stage of the quantitative analysis involves the categorisation of tweets

according to their persuasive, political purposes. The following operational definitions were

devised:

1. Motivating Youth Participation

2. Personal Testimony

3. Addressing the Opposition Directly

4. Criticism of the Opposition

5. Praising the Movement's Success

Stage 2 examines the prevalence of words or phrases coded to a specific category. For

example, since category 1 pertains to both youth and participation, synonyms such as *kids*,

students, Generation Z and words synonymic with political participation such as *rally*, *voting*,

and *marching* are accounted for (Appendix A). Category 2 involves the activists' sharing

personal stories of survival, while categories 3 and 4 pertain to how the students subvert

power relations by the ways they address politicians, the NRA and media, either by name, official title or by the pronoun variants of *you*. Category 5 concerns the students' foregrounding of the movement's accomplishments to motivate youth participation. The content analysis strengthens the qualitative findings by providing an overview of the linguistic devices enabling solidarity to manifest. Additionally, it accounts for the *frequency* with which the students' call upon ideological themes to mobilise young people, establish a collective identity and subvert power relations. To appreciate *how* the MFOL students communicate solidarity within these contexts, one must go beyond quantification and employ MCDA to uncover the texts' latent meanings.

b. Foucauldian MCDA

MCDA is an interpretative, multi-faceted approach to examining how structures of power emerge in everyday language use (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Deacon et al., 2007). A Foucauldian perspective underscores the "social, political and ideological" aspects of discourse, demonstrating that it does not simply "*describe* a pre-existing reality" but "actively *shapes*" our worldviews (Berger, 2016, p.179). While MCDA pertains to evaluating the language of powerful factions used to dominate others, contemporary studies endeavour to examine how subjugated groups use language as a resistance strategy (Berger, 2016). The following research departs from the conventional use of MCDA by analysing the discourse and iconography of the subordinate student activists, mirroring previous scholarship conducted on the Arab Spring. In these instances, MCDA analysed how Facebook and Twitter transformed "citizens-to-citizen" dialogue into mass-mobilisation networks opposing autocratic regimes (Shirazi, 2012, p.30; Al-Sowaidi et al., 2017). The students' desires to galvanise youth in a digitally-enabled private realm, forming a resistant counter-public sphere enabling political participation, aims to subvert dominant discourses through a solidary discourse of anger, empathy, hope, passion and humour. These emotions constitute the

themes of the qualitative analysis. By unearthing the underlying "social relations of power" present in texts, MCDA indicates discourse is not merely a persuasive, conversational mechanism, but a vehicle for "social construction and domination" (Berger, 2016, p.181).

Fairclough (1992, p.204) states the manifestation of informal, conversational language projected in "the personal interactions of the private sphere, into the public sphere", weakens hegemonic power, reshaping the boundaries separating private and public domains. MCDA puts forth an understanding of how informal discourse destroys the obvious marks of power and hierarchy present in institutional discourses (Fairclough, 1992). However, the dominant groups presented in this case study also adopt an informal, online presence, extending their power and influence into a digitally-equipped private sphere. This raises ethical questions about Twitter as a universal platform used to promote power relations, and whether it can provide subordinate, activist individuals with the adequate, equal-footing to confront what are at times largely inaccessible, elite groups.

Transitivity is the "study of social action", analysing how certain verb classifications determine what subjects are activated "agents/participants" and passivated "affected/patients" in situations of power and resistance (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p.104). In other words, it studies the ways in which verbs "characterise the actions of certain groups" and specify "who does what to whom" (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p.108). In transitivity analysis, the dynamic forces of society are activated subjects, as they "make things happen" by generating social action among mobilised groups (Fairclough, 2003, p.150). Furthermore, Arendt (1958) contends social action actualises freedom by providing an incentive to do the unexpected and initiates the collective action of people for public-political purposes. Although social action is contingent upon the consensus of participants to act, for this to happen, persuasive discourse is required. In order to examine how certain linguistic devices prompt a collective, solidary discourse, MCDA is crucial to comprehending how subjective, informal and persuasive

language circulated in a private realm can inspire resistance towards dominant discourses and political action in a counter-public sphere.

c. Sampling and Ethics

The sample consisted of the 100 most-liked, self-written tweets (includes retweets with comments, i.e. quote tweets) posted by the ten MFOL founders across ten months, starting from February 15th, 2018 to November 15, 2018. This framed timeline begins the day after the school-shooting to account for the students' immediate reactions to the tragedy and ends a week after the midterm elections to incorporate their responses to the results. The midterms were the students' catalyst for mobilising youth, perceiving the outcomes as measurable indicators of their activism. The qualitative analysis examines the two most-liked tweets of each student within the sample, totalling 4 tweets for each category of emotion constituting solidarity; these include anger, empathy, hope, passion and humour, resulting in a total of 20 tweets. Selecting the founders was contingent on the number of Twitter followers each student had, including their identification as a 'MFOL co-founder' visible from their profiles. Taking into account the ethics, the founders were high school juniors and seniors between 16 and 18 years old, ensuring no vulnerable subjects were affiliated with the research. Tweets from non-founding members under 16 years old were excluded from data collection. Although the students tweeted to reach millions of young people in the public domain, their data is still identifiable, and hence, personal. To comply with GDPR (2018) guidelines, I have explicitly stated my rationale for examining the students' data and have referenced each analysed tweet (Appendix B).

d. Evaluation of Methods

Content analysis provides a replicable coding scheme and transparent sampling procedure, allowing other analysts to easily conduct follow-up studies. For this reason, it is seen as an objective form of analysis (Bryman, 2012). Yet, it is arguably impossible to

conceive a coding manual without the coder's own interpretation, as one must rely upon their subjective, "everyday knowledge" of a participatory, common culture (Garfinkel, 1967). Content analysis is an unobtrusive method as it does not involve subject participation, nor does it require the physical presence of the researcher (Bryman, 2012). Its universality indicates its adaptability to a variety of unstructured texts and can therefore boost the validity of a qualitative analysis (Bryman, 2012). However, its propensity for measurement means it is accused of undermining what is latently significant in a text.

Critical scholars lament about the qualitative researcher's proclivity for subjective interpretation over strict analysis (Widdowson, 1995; Forceville, 1999; Pennycook, 2001). However, Fairclough (1999) argues it is impossible and ill-advised for analysts to separate beliefs and values from empirical study, as it is their personal interest and knowledge in the subject that informs their perspective. Deacon et al. (2007) adds to this, claiming objectivity is an illusory and unattainable practice for analysts to maintain, as their impressionistic and interpretive perspective is apparent throughout each stage of the research. For instance, subjective decisions are made about what to study, research questions and choosing an appropriate method. Fairclough (2003; 2010) asserts textual analysis is unavoidably selective, as certain empirical motivations choose to ask certain questions over others; nevertheless, he insists analysts should try to distance themselves from their field of investigation to allow for self-reflection of their involvement. As an American citizen and resident of Florida, the proximity of this study to my personal life allows me to consider my own position on the issue of gun violence in the U.S. Furthermore, it urges me to critically analyse whether the subversion of authoritative, adult power by students via Twitter is a plausible feat in a heavily partisan, unequal society. This aspect of MCDA bolsters the transparency of the analyst's findings, minimising assumptions and over-generalisations (Van Dijk, 2001).

While it would be useful to interview the founders, time restraints and their vulnerability as mass-shooting survivors limits this possibility. Instead, this research partakes in a close analysis of how solidary discourse and iconography subverts power relations by using linguistic and visual conventions to encourage collective action (Foucault, 1984). MCDA interrogates texts to comprehend the "deep structures, systematic communicative distortions and power relations" associated with discourse (Cukier, et al., 2008, p.17). It is worth assessing language within a social movement context, as its meaning-making process tends to provoke political action (Fairclough, 2003). As a qualitative method, MCDA offers a wide range of linguistic and semiotic tools for analysis, allowing the analyst to customise his or her own research procedure (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Therefore, MCDA is not a method of simplified analysis, but an immersive means to interpreting the role of discourse in social life and in the formation of power relations.

4. Findings and Discussion

Organised according to the emotions related to political solidarity, these findings reveal how the solidary discourse of the MFOL founders aims to mobilise young people within their private spheres, leading to their participation in a counter-public resistant towards the dominant discourses of politicians, the NRA and media.

a. Anger

While anger is perceived by social theorists as an individualistic, destructive emotion accompanied by retribution, if used strategically by marginalised groups, shared anger can signal to a realisation of wrongdoing, leading to mass-protest against a shared injustice (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). The activists' constructive use of anger to describe their first-hand accounts of a mass-shooting legitimises their authority to discuss gun violence and demand political action. Additionally, it subverts the power of politicians by noting their inability to understand the students' plight, and unwillingness to resolve the issue. It also results in the forced transformation of a sheltered sphere of childhood preservation into a digitally-enabled domain of political mobilisation (Papacharissi, 2010). Chadwick addresses politicians collectively, holding them accountable for their inability to enact gun legislation (fig.1).

Figure 1: @Sarahchadwickk
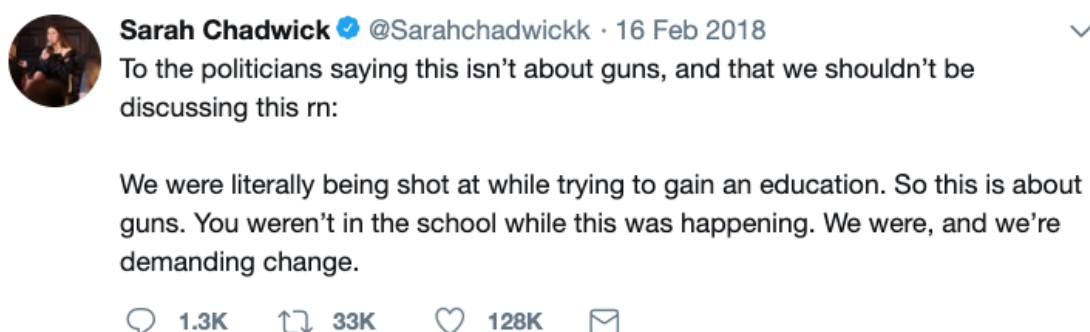
She undermines her opposition, paraphrasing their words in order to counterargue with 'we were being shot at'. Chadwick rejects the authoritative knowledge of politicians, replacing it with her personal truth resulting from her memory of the shooting, suggesting the "personal is political" (van Zoonen, 2012, p.65). By repeating *we* and *we were*, Chadwick makes salient

the solidarity felt among her fellow survivors and establishes the dichotomy between the students' plights and lawmakers' apathetic distances.

While personal testimony is seen as a strategic guarantor of the authenticity of activist groups, the quantitative analysis revealed the minor impact personal testimony had among the sample, representing just 8 percent of all tweets. The students were keen to mobilise young people with energised, direct calls to action, rather than sharing fear-inducing accounts of the shooting. Additionally, personal accounts might be construed as a sign of vulnerability and helplessness, weakening the activists' identities as influential, active subjects. The movement's virality surpassed the isolated incident of Parkland, and began to signify nationwide protest against gun violence, giving little importance to personal testimony. Nevertheless, Chadwick's mediated antagonism demonstrates her authority to vocalise her dissent and demand constructive solutions.

Incorporating politicians' tweets as part of the students' own quote tweets is a popular means of subverting authority. Tarr's antagonistic response to Republican Representative Porter reveals her desire to revert to the normalcy of childhood, yet the inaction of politicians forces her into activism (fig.2). Without physically altering the Representative's words, Tarr's quote tweet allows Porter's own discourse to be used against her, constituting an act of resistance. As Foucault (1984, p.65) contends, language is not a mere reflection of reality; rather, it actively constructs it. Porter's comments reveal her opposition to the politicisation of young people, perceiving them to be politically inept, detrimental contributors to public policy:

"[...] Do we allow the children to tell us that we should pass a law that says, 'no homework'? The adults make the laws because we have the age, wisdom and experience. We make laws with our heads, not our emotions."

Her speech elevates adults to dominant, active lawmakers, reducing minors to passive, dependent subjects incapable of participation in the public sphere. Tarr invalidates her

comments, and to an extent, subverts the authority of all politicians by asserting the indifference of adults who 'haven't done' their jobs has compelled her to 'fix a broken system' so children like herself can 'safely go to school'.

Figure 2: @delaneytarr
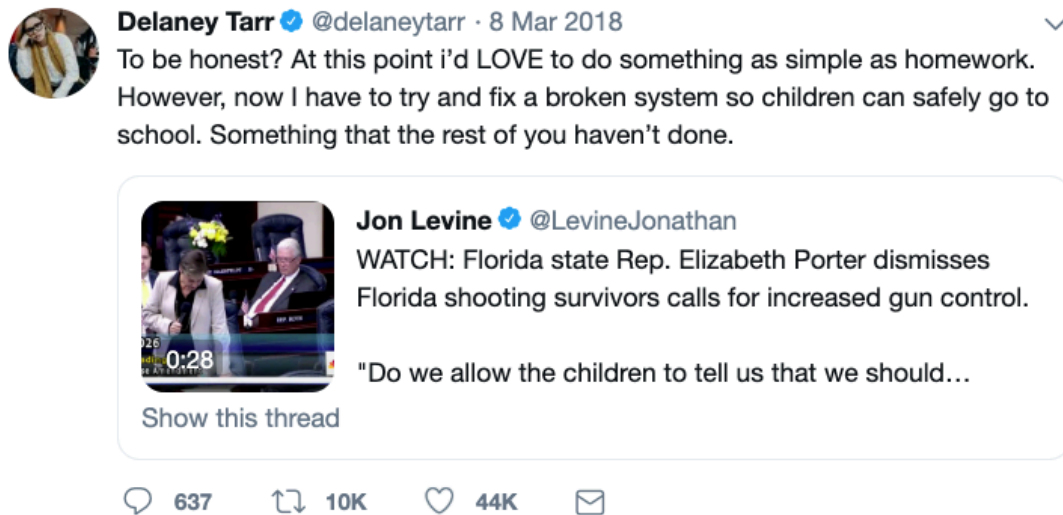
By using *I*, Tarr speaks from a privileged position, revealing the ineffectiveness of politicians to safeguard minors' private spheres of childhood innocence (Fairclough, 2003; Arendt, 1958). Although speaking as an *I* signifies integrity and commitment to an issue (Machin and Mayr, 2012), only 14 percent of tweets contained *I*, *I'm* and *my*, compared to 38 percent of tweets solely mentioning the pronouns *we, we're*, *us* and *our*. The content analysis therefore reveals the importance of speaking as a collective to motivate the participation of others, as the students cannot singlehandedly bring about gun control without the involvement of other youth.

Quote tweets serving as direct appeals to politicians by incorporating capitalised words and the pro-noun *you* propagate an antagonistic urgency. In her direct plea to Donald Trump, Corin's statement of '*our* children' creates an "us versus them" dichotomy intended to condemn the President for his inaction and emotionally absent tweet (Mouffe, 2005) (fig.3). The informality of the phrase, 'not looking good' followed by 'God bless all!' connotes apathy, indifference and an unwillingness to initiate reform. Corin resorts to informal, demanding language in response to Trump, capitalising the words 'MURDERED'

and 'DO SOMETHING'. Corin's use of these words is twofold; in trying to capture the President's attention, she insinuates the routinised behaviour of politicians to normalise, rather than prevent, school-shootings.

Figure 3: @JaclynCorin

Alhanti adopts a similar, antagonistic approach when he replies to news outlets' queries about how they can contribute to the movement (fig.4). The capitalisation of 'EXACTLY' and phrase 'stop with the bullshit' connote frustration towards the media's biased coverage as they routinely fail to recognise minorities as victims of the same tragedy. By highlighting these systemic, societal inequalities, Alhanti recognises his white privilege, proving he has the moral awareness needed to participate in the public sphere (Kulynych, 2001).

Figure 4: @AAlhanti

Alhanti feels morally obligated to his marginalised peers living in urban areas where gun violence is a daily threat, but nonetheless, remains absent from the news cycle. His solution to the media's bias suggests mediated anger, if vocalised as a shared objection to social

injustice, can move beyond the self-interest of individual anger by asking, "what can be done, and how?" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.96).

Personal pronouns are inherent fixtures in conversational, informal language. In Corin's and Alhanti's tweets in particular, the informality of the pronouns *you*, *your* and *you're* used to articulate contempt towards dominant groups (without mentioning their names) represents 14 percent of all tweets. This result was compared to the percentage of tweets using the same pronouns to address young people as groups, resulting in 16 percent of the total sample. The variants of *you* were found to be reasonably distributed across both addressee categories, with tweets addressing young people as a collective accounting for slightly more. Nevertheless, it was found both categories merited similar levels of importance when incorporating the various forms of *you.*

b. Empathy

Empathy is an essential precondition to political action, as it allows the experiences of others to form a part of our "moral baseline" (Koehn, 1998, p.57). The students placed the victims at the forefront of the movement, evoking empathetic participation from supporters who see themselves as the next target. Conveying empathy via Twitter enables connective action networks between the activists and other youth groups who have endured similar ordeals, creating mobilised alliances against gun violence. González's thread is indication of the racial superiority the MFOL students have over minority, gun violence prevention groups. The media prioritised coverage of the Parkland shooting as victims were mostly Caucasian, affluent and had attended school in Florida's wealthiest, 'safest' city. She forms an empathetic dualism between her brief encounter with gun violence and its ubiquity in Chicago. The words 'glimpsed' and 'gated communities' describe its rarity in Parkland, while 'few weeks alone' indicates the media's instantaneous response to the students' activism, compared to kids 'of color' who have 'never had their voices heard' (fig.5).

Figure 5: @emma4change

Emma González ✔ @Emma4Change · 4 Mar 2018

(1/4)Yesterday, the members of @AMarch4OurLives got to meet up with some of the most wonderful and most strong spoken students of Chicago. "Florida's safest city" and one of the cities in America most affected by gun violence came together to share stories, ideologies, and pizza.

💬 801   🔁 12K   ♡ 48K   ✉

Emma González ✔ @Emma4Change · 4 Mar 2018

(2/4) Those who face gun violence on a level that we have only just glimpsed from our gated communities have never had their voices heard in their entire lives the way that we have in these few weeks alone. Since we all share in feeling this pain and know all too well how it

💬 57   🔁 2.9K   ♡ 15K   ✉

Emma González ✔ @Emma4Change · 4 Mar 2018

(3/4) feels to have to grow up at the snap of a finger, we were able to cover a lot of ground in communicating our experiences. People of color in inner-cities and everywhere have been dealing with this for a despicably long time, and the media cycles just don't cover the

💬 51   🔁 3.2K   ♡ 18K   ✉

Emma González ✔ @Emma4Change · 4 Mar 2018

(4/4) violence the way they did here. The platform us Parkland Students have established is to be shared with every person, black or white, gay or straight, religious or not, who has experienced gun violence, and hand in hand, side by side, We Will Make This Change Together.

💬 534   🔁 5.3K   ♡ 31K   ✉

González strives to diminish the racial power relations evident among gun violence survivors by creating a narrative of empathetic solidarity, stating, 'we all share this pain', 'hand-in-hand', 'side-by-side'. She prevents the Parkland students' superiority from weakening the agencies of coloured advocates by declaring the MFOL a platform to be shared by *all* young people affected by gun violence.

The iconography bolsters this empathetic unity by portraying the solidary gathering of black and white students leant forward, intently listening to each other's stories and political ideologies. Yet, the presence of adult chaperones serves as a reminder of the students' fragile youth; as teenagers, they remain dependent on their guardians for protection and financial support. The capitalisation of 'We Will Make This Change Together' underscores González's desire for the movement to operate collaboratively, rather than be led by a privileged few. Although the activists recognise their prerogative, accusing the media of its racial bias and advocating for better equality, latent power relations reveal within a stratified public sphere, some Generation Z voices, and to a grave extent, *lives*, are more valued than others.

Wind and Kasky endeavour to evoke pathos among their peers, persuading them to carry out empathetic actions to honour the victims and assist those too young to vote, like Kasky himself. Wind's articulation of the verbs *take, make, do,* and *spread* urge his followers to commit compassionate acts to counter the brutality of mass-shootings. The descending, short syntactical organisation of his sentences convey sorrow and tacitly foists guilt upon those still alive (fig.6). While the sincerity of Wind's heartfelt language may be interpreted as disruptive to a rational public sphere, its morality impels young people toward solidarity, establishing civic and social bonds among the movement's participants (Habermas, 1962; Scholz, 2008).

Figure 6: @al3xw1nd

Alex Wind ✔ @al3xw1nd · 1 Apr 2018

You never know when a day will be your last.

Take risks.

Make a new friend.

Spread love.

Do something for the 17 that can't do anything anymore.

#NeverAgain

💬 38   🔁 808   ♡ 4.6K   ✉

Moreover, Kasky underlines the importance of the midterms, blending the personal with the political by insisting they will be 'the most crucial elections' of his lifetime (fig.7). He portrays his helplessness by confessing, 'I can't vote, everybody', aiming to prompt an empathetic response from his fellow, eligible peers to vote on his behalf. While the Parkland students may be digitally adept in conveying solidarity on Twitter to mobilise young people within their private realms, translating their engagement to a resistant counter-public, for many, age remains the greatest hindrance to political participation in the public sphere (Kulynych, 2001; Hart and Atkins, 2011).

Figure 7: @cameron_kasky

Cameron Kasky ✔ @cameron_kasky · 5 Oct 2018

Every single day, this year's midterm elections become more important. I expect this to be one of the most crucial elections of my lifetime.

I can't vote, everybody. Please get out there.

💬 157   🔁 1.8K   ♡ 10K   ✉

Although the Columbine high school massacre occurred twenty years prior, Gonzalez's tweet reflects the empathy all survivors have for each other (fig.8). Orange has become a universal, cultural symbol of surviving gun violence, inspired by the orange uniforms worn by deer hunters' to prevent them from being mistaken as targets. It is also

used by the students as an alternative symbol of their shared political perspectives. Rather than voting 'red' for Republican or 'blue' for Democrat, the students commit to voting 'orange' by electing politicians who actively support their cause. While metaphors and symbolism account for a moderate 14 percent of all tweets, they produce distinct representations of the students' worldviews. Furthermore, they create solidarity by contributing creative, alternative meanings for interpreting the world, having a memorable impact on the audience (Fairclough, 2003, p.132). González wears an orange jumpsuit resembling a prison uniform to stand in solidarity with other survivors while also symbolising her vulnerability as a potential target. The jumpsuit is construed as a symbol of the increased security measures enforced at her school, making it feel more like a prison than an educational facility. Ultimately, empathy can be seen as a multi-faceted emotion promoting equality, pathos and solidarity.

Figure 8: @emma4change

To evoke empathy, González's tweets put forth personal and possessive pronouns, creating a sense of *we* intended to mobilise youth. Almost 75 percent of tweets displaying

pronouns were directed towards young people. *I, I'm* and *my* are used by the students to hold themselves accountable, to take ownership of the movement and forge transparent, personal connections with supporters. *We, we're,* and *us* creates a sense of solidarity, portrayed by González's intention to wear orange by saying 'we wear it today in solidarity', while her use of *our* articulates the need to preserve 'our communities' (fig.8). As indicated by González's tweet, 75 percent of the students' tweets displaying personal and possessive pronouns intended to stir the political curiosities of young people, compared to the 22 percent of tweets using personal and possessive pronouns to call out or provoke dominant groups.

c. Hope

While harnessing new technology as a means to political ends can generate hope, establishing the collective consciousness needed for online participation, the *raison d'être* of using Twitter as a conduit of emotion is to mobilise those active online to tangible, political action *offline* (Fenton, 2016). Wind's tweet captures the physical departure of thousands of high school students from the private, digital realm to a counter-public sphere of on-the-ground activism (fig.9). A week after the shooting, students from neighbouring towns are shown marching towards Parkland in a demonstration of solidarity, establishing offline connections with one another in the "spirit of mutuality and reciprocity" by chanting '#NeverAgain' (Fenton, 2008, p.59). A few wear maroon shirts, the official color of MSDHS, to display a unified front. This tangible evidence produced by the platform's online interactivity indicates the private to public transition is a resistant, political act (Fenton, 2008). Wind circulates hope among his peers by praising their activism as 'incredible' (fig.9). His positive affirmations convince young people of their ability to assemble as non-violent protestors, subverting the authority of politicians apathetic to mass-shootings.

Figure 9: @al3xw1nd

Alex Wind ✔ @al3xw1nd · 21 Feb 2018
4 pictures wouldn't do it justice so this one would. Thousands of students marching from their schools to mine in support and hearing them chanting the movement that me and my best friends started was absolutely incredible. #NeverAgain

💬 33   🔁 630   ♡ 3.3K   ✉

Deitsch's repetition of *we* followed by the verbs *registering*, *engaging,* and *saving* establishes an "us versus them" (Mouffe, 2005) relationship between the students and dominant groups (fig.10). The former's political activity contrasts to the insensitivity of the media, who have stopped covering the shooting. By listing past massacres the news have ceased reporting, Deitsch implies their constant pursuit of fresh angles contributes to the normalisation of mass-shootings. He mentions the 2012 Sandy Hook school-shooting last, in which twenty 6-year-olds were killed. By doing this, Deitsch connotes the politicians who stood idle to this tragedy as evil, further subverting power relations. Yet, the words '*we* are still' and '*we* will' illustrate hope. By associating the *we* group as the solution, it demonstrates the students' commitment, arguing the collective action of young people is essential to attaining the largest youth turnout in a midterm election, in the hope it will lead to stricter gun legislation.

Figure 10: @MattxRed

Deitsch's use of the modal '*will*' is an indication of future probability. He resorts to the "power of prediction", (Fairclough, 2003) committing himself to saving lives by engaging and registering people to vote. This fidelity to young people's political participation is discursively conveyed by the modal verbs comprising 51 percent of all tweets, with *'will'* alone accounting for 20 percent. By ensuring a degree of certainty and possibility to attaining gun control, modal verbs reaffirm the MFOL students' moral obligations to young people nationwide and to the victims of Parkland (Fairclough, 2003).

Hogg's aim to over-persuade and empower his peers by repeating 'we are the future' (fig.11) indicates an ideological contention between the students and opposition (Machin and Mayr, 2012). By using metaphor to equate youth to the future, the phrase's overlexicalisation makes salient young people's embodiment of hope. The repetition of *win* propels hope further by associating young peoples' voting with winning, motivating them to subvert relations of power within a counter-public sphere by voting against passive lawmakers who Hogg delineates as the defeated. Overlexicalisation constitutes 22 percent of all tweets, providing repetition and synonyms for words corresponding to young people's political participation, such as *kids, voting, marching* and *win*, to convince them of their capacity to bring about social change. The students' over-persuasion of young people's capabilities signifies hope, putting forth the belief that this demographic alone could decide the midterm election results.

Figure 11: @davighogg111

David Hogg ✔ @davidhogg111 · 26 May 2018

We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future
We are the future

When the future votes, the future wins the young people, will win.

💬 1.8K   ⟲ 11K   ♡ 63K   ✉

By relying on overlexicalisation and metaphor to signify young people as the future, the students put forth the hope required to create and sustain the solidarity needed to disrupt the hegemonic powers of an unpopular dominant group.

To foreground the identities of young people as arbiters of hope, Deitsch highlights the movement's triumphs in the midterm elections (fig.12). He articulates transitivity by describes his peers as active agents capable of grassroots, virtuous action, as he insists the 'largest protest' in U.S. history was organised by a group of teenagers on a 'living room floor'. While tweets articulating the MFOL's accomplishments account for only 13 percent of the sample, it does not diminish the indispensability of hope to create solidarity, rather, the students' were perhaps cautious to overestimate their success prior to the election results. Furthermore, the transitive verbs *organised, registered* and *defeated* used to articulate the actions of the movement serve to activate the students, while passivating the NRA-backed politicians as non-active, defeated subjects (Halliday, 1978). At the end, Deitsch conveys hope by optimistically declaring, 'this is the beginning', ultimately creating an expectation of a better future comprised of young leaders (Scholz, 2008). His quantification of the movement's actions, (ex: 63-day bus tour, 200 chapters, hundreds of thousands of people)

followed by the capitalisation of 'DEFEATED 27 NRA-BACKED CANDIDATES', serves as tangible evidence of the students' abilities to triumph over dominant groups and their proclivity as active subjects to succeed.

Figure 12: @MattxRed

Matt Deitsch ✔ @MattxRed · 7 Nov 2018   ∨

A group of kids on a living room floor organized the largest protest in American history... a 63 day bus tour... over 200 chapters... registered hundreds of thousands of people... AND DEFEATED 27 (!!!) NRA BACKED CANDIDATES.

I'm so proud of all of us. This is the beginning.

◯ 1.1K   ⇄ 15K   ♡ 81K   ✉

d. Passion

Passion assists in making political decisions, creating political community and stimulating political action (Dahlgren, 2009). Kasky and Alhanti attempt to create a political community by defining passionate involvement as young people voting in the 2018 midterms. Youth participation therefore acts as a measurable indicator of the movement's success. Kasky makes a passionate plea for voting in the elections, supporting his point by mentioning the words *election, polls* and *midterms* (fig.13).

Figure 13: @cameron_kasky

Cameron Kasky ✔ @cameron_kasky · 29 Jun 2018   ∨

In the coming election, there is no room for apathy. There is far too much on the line for anybody to question whether or not it's worth their time to go to the polls. These midterms are a key election in deciding the course our country will be taking in the years to come.

◯ 462   ⇄ 9.1K   ♡ 33K   ✉

His urgent tone exudes passion as he alludes to the consequences inevitably resulting from the refusal to vote, yet, he does not say what *is* exactly at stake, and leaves it open to audience interpretation. Kasky's avoidance of explanatory evidence to support his claims constitutes power relations and is a characteristic of elite discourse (Fairclough and Wodak,

1997, p.273). Seen utilising the discursive tactics of dominant groups, Kasky sabotages their power by urging young people to vote.

To weaken elite power and generate social change, Alhanti proposes the passionate, pragmatic solution of registering to vote (fig.14), whereas Barnitt is committed to raising the morale among his peers in anticipation of the midterms (fig.15). Speaking directly to Generation Z and Millennial populations, Alhanti intends to encourage their political participation by insisting it will scare apathetic politicians, compromising their influence within the public sphere. By motivating youth participation in a counter-public sphere, he seeks to promote an inclusive democracy where young people's concerns are validated. As Young (1997, p.392) argues, deliberation cannot be transformative when the "experiences, knowledge and interests" of youth are disregarded or exploited for political gain.

Figure 14: @AAlhanti

To counter politicians' indifference toward eradicating gun violence, Alhanti evinces passion by instructing young people to 'follow through' and vote. The hashtag #getoutandvote hinders passivity by urging youth to engage in a counter-public site of palpable action. This transition from covert, online to overt, corporeal spheres foregrounds a young person's agency, giving rise to representations of power (Fairclough, 2003).

Barnitt's use of action verbs *force* and *push* (fig.15) challenge relations of power by characterising young people as social actors who "make things happen" (Fairclough, 2003, p.150). The capitalisation of *substantial* attests to their empowerment and political identities by serving as an ultimatum for politicians to either pass legislation or risk being unseated.

Barnitt's appeals to the engagement of his peers by praising the vocalisation of the student in the retweeted clip, describing her counter-publicity as driven, vigorous and passionate.

Figure 15: @John_Barnitt

Tweets like this, coded as 'Motivating Youth Participation', account for 43 percent of the sample, making it the category with the most tweets. This figure encapsulates the centrality of youth engagement to the MFOL movement, as it determines how solidarity is *affectively* articulated in order to elicit an activated, impassioned response. The movement's principal objective was to put the onus on young people to mobilise, vote and singlehandedly attain gun control. Barnitt's video features an underage student on the movement's periphery (fig.15), threatening President Trump and Senator Rubio:

"This November, I know how all of our parents' votes are going to go […] I hope you're listening to me when I say that change is happening, and we're bringing it NOW! […] And if our words mean nothing to you, Marco Rubio, Donald Trump, I sure hope our parents' votes do, because they're coming, soon!"

While her clenched fist, lunging stance and antagonistic expression conveys passion, the girl exposes the reality of voter ineligibility laws preventing underaged, yet, politically-informed youth from voting. This restriction of civic rights relegates young people to Arendt's (1958) description of the private realm as a depoliticised space. Reliant on their parents' votes to represent their interests, young people's political identities are made illegitimate. While able to mobilise on Twitter and perpetuate a counter-discourse subversive towards dominant groups, her assertive threat to politicians is subsequently made paradoxical, rendering her a latent, passive subject. Yet, Barnitt's retweet of her impassioned speech enables others within the private realm to identify with her truth, establishing instant collective action networks.

Figure 16: @JaclynCorin

Jaclyn Corin ✔ @JaclynCorin · 20 Feb 2018
We are KIDS - not actors. We are KIDS that have grown up in Parkland all of our lives. We are KIDS who feared for our lives while someone shot up our school. We are KIDS working to prevent this from happening again. WE ARE KIDS.

💬 6.1K   🔁 61K   ♡ 297K   ✉

Corin's personal testimony passionately draws attention to the reality that surviving *kids* of a mass-shooting are forced to protect *other* kids, accusing apathetic adults of their idleness. Furthermore, it characterises young people as activated subjects spearheading a national movement to capture the attentions of passive dominant groups. Lastly, her sharing of personal testimony positions Corin as an authoritative figure, weakening the adult-versus-kid power relationship. Overlexicalising 'we are KIDS' uncovers the latent meanings surrounding young people's identities. Right-wing politicians accusing the students to be crisis actors strive to refute their identities as mass-shooting victims, activists, voters, and as innocent minors, compelling Corin to subvert their authority and defend the movement's reputation. Her indirect accusatory tweet of dominant groups is subsequently coded as

'Criticism of the Opposition', the third largest category constituting 16 percent of tweets. Dismissive of elite groups, these tweets dismantle the former's authoritative identities, refraining from using names, titles or variants of the personal pronoun *you* by characterising them as a faceless, detached, and passionless entity. However, the categories 'Motivating Youth Participation' (43 percent of tweets) and 'Addressing the Opposition Directly' (20 percent of tweets) reiterate the imperative placed on encouraging young people's participation in a counter-public sphere and the effectiveness of using someone's name or an accusatory '*you*' to hold people publicly accountable. Furthermore, the statement 'WE ARE KIDS' boosts the morale of youth to effect change, prompting their mobilisation. Additionally, it exposes adults' apathy towards protecting children, forcing Corin to advocate for her own life, a role she argues, kids should not have to assume.
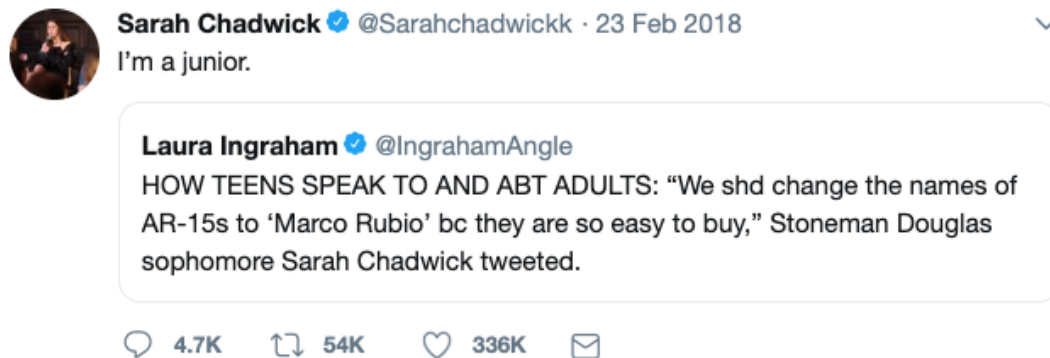
e. Humour

As a strategic mechanism of solidarity, informal acts of humour eliminate "asymmetries of power" by satirising the action, or *inaction* of dominant groups (Fairclough, 1992, p.204). Chadwick sardonically corrects an inaccuracy made by Fox News presenter, Laura Ingraham, clarifying she is a high school *junior*, not a sophomore. Her witty retort dismisses the presenter, subverting the adult-versus-kid power relationship (fig.17). Ingraham's tweet is a retaliatory, open-reply to Chadwick's satirical wordplay about Senator Marco Rubio. Her comparison of him to an AR-15 assault rifle has a double-meaning; she insinuates his refusal to pass gun legislation will result in another mass-shooting, and second, his acceptance of NRA donations makes him as 'easy to buy' as a semi-automatic weapon. Her dark humour reveals NRA funding takes precedence over young people's lives, further diminishing the morality of corrupted politicians. The words 'AR-15s', 'Marco Rubio' and Chadwick's allusion to the NRA implies satire is a cultural product bound in socio-political

terms; for it to make sense, it must refer to recognisable "cultural symbols" (Kutz-

Flamenbaum, 2014, p.296).

Figure 17: @Sarahchadwickk

Sarah Chadwick ✔ @Sarahchadwickk · 23 Feb 2018

I'm a junior.

Laura Ingraham ✔ @IngrahamAngle
HOW TEENS SPEAK TO AND ABT ADULTS: "We shd change the names of AR-15s to 'Marco Rubio' bc they are so easy to buy," Stoneman Douglas sophomore Sarah Chadwick tweeted.

💬 4.7K   ⟲ 54K   ♡ 336K   ✉

Finally, Chadwick's use of the quote tweet to display Ingraham's discourse enables her to

share the rhetoric of dominant groups on *her* terms, demonstrating the customisable power of

Twitter. By including oppositional discourses in their tweets, the students prove the exertion

of power is not a forceful act, but one actively *incorporating* those subjected to it, retooling

them to align with their agendas (Foucault, 1984).

Figure 18: @John_Barnitt

John Barnitt ✔ @John_Barnitt · 14 Mar 2018
And they thought we were only capable at eating tide pods.
#NationalWalkoutDay

💬 213   ⟲ 3.5K   ♡ 24K   ✉

Barnitt's joke about consuming laundry detergent pods is a cultural symbol relevant

among young people (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014). The 2017 Tide Pod Challenge went viral in

the U.S; teenagers posted YouTube videos of themselves gagging on the pods, daring their

peers to copy them. Politicians and the media subsequently criticised the kids, calling them

ill-informed (Chokshi, 2018). As if telling an inside joke, Barnitt redeems his peers by

alluding to their participation in the National Walkout, implying their capability of collective

protest in a counter-public sphere supersedes the act of ingesting detergent. As Hart (2007,

p.6) states, "our laughter is always that of a collective group", leading to the formation of

social bonds and internal cohesion necessary for the creation of political solidarity. Ultimately, the joke is on '*they*' – the dominant groups who underestimated the potency of young people's political participation.

The informality concomitant of conversational humour may also be portrayed by iconography, as is the case with comical GIFs shared via social media. Hogg boosts his relatability among youth by posting a humorous GIF of a terrier barrelling towards a colony of sealions on a boating dock, forcing them back into the sea (fig. 19).

Figure 19: @davidhogg11
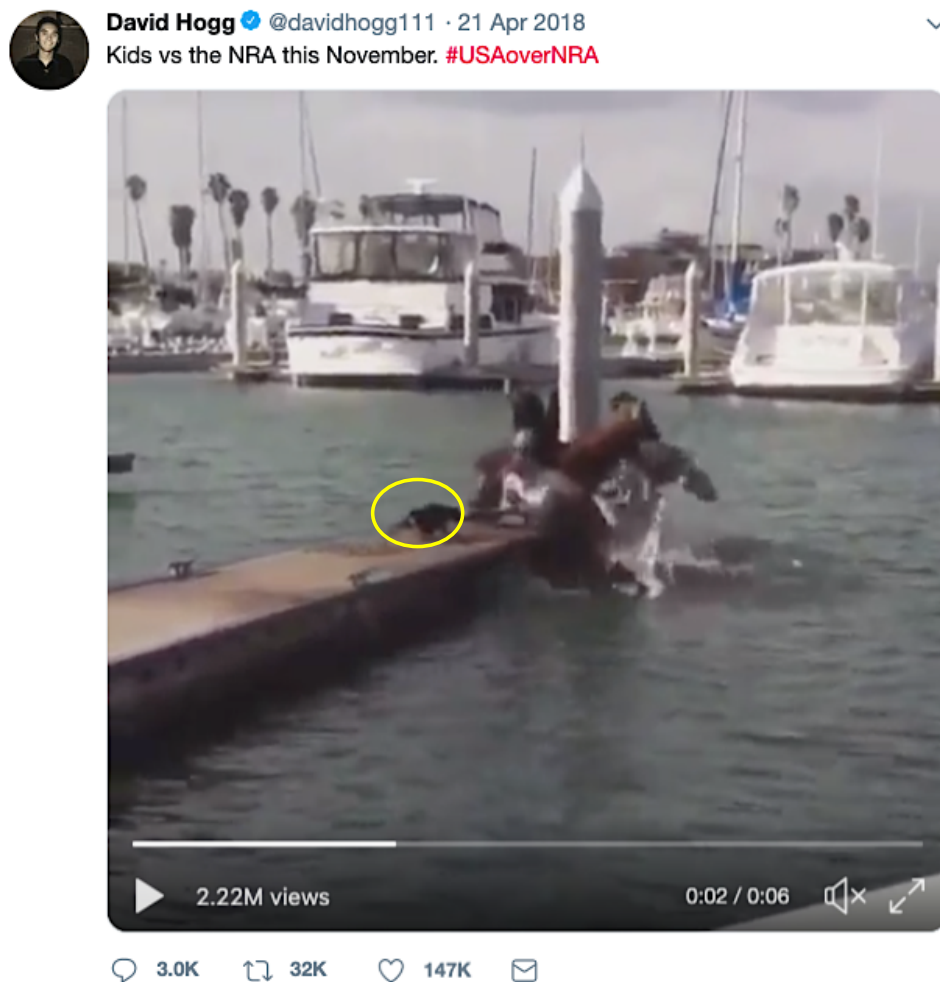
The dog symbolises the triumphs of young people to oust passive, NRA-backed politicians (the sea lions) by voting in the elections; this is discursively articulated by the caption, 'Kids vs the NRA this November.' According to Fairclough (1992), an informal style generates authority and relatability as it indicates the author's ability to speak the language of the

group. The #USAoverNRA hashtag subverts power relations by connoting the student as the moral defenders of American values, implying the refusal of NRA-backed politicians to enact gun legislation as antithetical to these values. Hogg (2018, p.217) asserts informal, comedic language is essential to weakening dominant discursive power, as it "signals you do not take their 'arguments' seriously, you prove your point and confuse your attacker because angry people don't know what to do with humour […] comedy is the best tactic in this kind of meme warfare." Kutz-Flamenbaum (2014, p.296) states relations of power enable the "conception and reception" of humour. While the GIF is amusing to the MFOL's supporters, this visual depiction of the NRA's defeat will prompt an antagonistic counter-reply.

Humour helps to frame a social movement's agenda by furthering the creation of a collective identity (Hart, 2007). Tarr's sardonic tone frames the communal dissidence of Parkland survivors after students are forced to carry transparent backpacks for security (fig. 20). Tarr indirectly criticises Florida legislatures for introducing clear backpacks as opposed to common-sense gun laws by sarcastically admitting she feels 'super safe' at school. Her tweet demonstrates how humour can be a practical tool for the subversion of power relations.

Figure 20: @delaneytarr

Tarr's juxtaposition of tampons and pens is comical, as the items are unrelated. The audience tries to comprehend this incongruency, and in doing so, finds it amusing (Hart, 2007). Her tweet's latent meanings indicate she is disconcerted by the invasion of her privacy and disaffected with the inability of politicians to secure her safety. Nevertheless, Tarr's humorous, informality hides her vulnerability, "linking interests to social action" by boosting her relatability among youth in the private sphere, ultimately engendering a solidary collective of politicised young people (Hart, 2007, p.9).

5. Conclusion

This dissertation takes an alternative approach to the issue of gun violence in America. Framed by academic debates about the public sphere, social media, emotion and young people's political participation, it foregrounds the agencies of students as morally obligated leaders of a movement advocating for gun control. Rather than interpret the media's coverage of the event, the research focuses on the survivors' discursive solidarity via Twitter, analysing how antagonistic, empathetic, hopeful, passionate and humorous language mobilises young people within their private spheres, prompting their participation in a counter-public of protest against passive, political elites. The 2018 midterm elections were the catalyst behind the students' activism. By galvanising the young vote, they endeavoured to elect politicians sympathetic to gun legislation.

The research objectives were contingent on the private sphere's transformation from an isolating realm of youth preservation to a digitally-equipped site encouraging young people's political engagement. The first research question asked, 'how did the students' solidary discourse aim to mobilise youth within these private realms and politicise them in a resistant counter-public sphere of on-the-ground activism?' Additionally, the second question asked, 'in what ways has the students' discourse managed to subvert the hegemonic discourses of politicians, the NRA and media?' Papacharissi (2010) asserts the modern private sphere of social media networks is a removed space fostering political discovery, blurring the distinction between public and private. The activists used Twitter as a conduit of emotion to eliminate the institutionalised powerlessness felt among youth whose voting rights are denied and interests represented by adults in a stratified public sphere. A subaltern counter-public circulates the activists' antagonistic and resistant discourse criticising elite groups, establishing an exclusive space for youth participation and empowerment. Foucauldian-informed MCDA examines how the students' discursive solidarity subverts

power relations, and further, how power and resistance work symbiotically within discourse (Foucault, 1982). The content analysis revealed personal and possessive pro-nouns and modal verbs were the most prevalent linguistic techniques used to convey solidarity and motivate youth participation. The persuasion, informality, and sense of urgency and commitment resulting from these discursive devices were relatable to young people, and antithetical to the agendas of politicians.

A misconception of Web 2.0 is its capability to launch decentralised, horizontal social movements; however, social media offers neither complete leaderless spontaneity, nor can it be solely recognised for enabling vast mobilisation networks (Gerbaudo, 2015). Rather, it was found performed *emotion* is the primary arbiter of mobilising collective action and a counter-publicity disabling the discursive power of the dominant sphere. Instead, non-human, technological actants are universal, applicable tools moulded and shaped by the "forces of human actors" to disseminate persuasive discourses across a multiplicity of media platforms for a strategic purpose (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.174). This is evident from the activists' adoption of the Twitter 'quote tweet' feature. Retweeting the opposition's hegemonic rhetoric enabled the students to address figures directly by including their own angered, critical responses within the same tweet, creating an antagonistic space whereby young person and adult could contend with one another on equal footing (Fairclough, 1992). Social media can be seen as a *conduit* of a discursive, emotional solidarity accountable for the advancement of youth-led social movements and as a leveller facilitating the subversion of power relations. While confronting hegemonic power proved seminal to the movement, the content analysis revealed its central objective was to motivate youth political participation. Tweets made effective by personal and possessive pronouns constituted three-quarters of the sample; this is evident from the students addressing young people as *you* and subsequently referring to

Generation Z as a whole by using *we* and *us*. This proved a popular means of mobilisation as it embodied the true meaning of "the personal as political" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p.78).

Empathy motivated youth political participation by evoking pathos for the survivors and the deceased, yet, it also unearthed the inherent realities of race and affluence as determinants of the movement's success. Although the activists declared the movement an inclusive platform for all young people touched by gun violence, this racial disparity revealed the media's disregard for the activism of coloured, inner-city groups preceding the Parkland shooting, and decision to prioritise coverage of the white, middle-class MFOL students. Furthermore, the activists' discursive hope and passion activated young people as voters against the passivity of politicians and as individuals oriented towards gun control. Hopeful language circulated the optimism felt among the students to bring about the highest youth voter turnout at a midterm election, while passionate discourse put forth pragmatic, reasoned strategies of how to achieve this, while also making urgent calls to vote. Lastly, the purport of humour to satirise the inaction of dominant groups subverts power relations and leads to collective action. Although the students endeavoured to contest authoritative power via a resistant, counter-public sphere refuting the stereotype of youth disinterestedness in politics, the tweets revealed the reality that voter ineligibility hinders many politically aware, young people in the public sphere, forcing them to rely on their parents for political representation. Indeed, despite the movement's political progress, citizens under 18 years old are still denied the inclusive right to full civic participation, leading to a discriminatory deliberative process diminishing the activated potentials of young people.

a. Further Recommendations

To address the shortcomings of this research, broadening the data sample by including tweets from less well-known members of the movement would have enhanced findings. If it were not for the ethical limitations preventing the study of minors, interviewing young participants might have bolstered the interpretive validity and objectivity of the results.

Nevertheless, subjectivity on behalf of the analyst's empirical decision-making is part and parcel of academic scholarship (Deacon et al., 2007). Subsequent studies in this topic area might pursue a comparable approach by including other popular forms of social media like Instagram and Snapchat. Additionally, a comprehensive analysis of dominant discourses would provide a thorough overview of how discursive power is exerted from both sides.

The success of MFOL rides on the momentum of previous youth-led demonstrations like the 'Dreamers' and 'Black Lives Matter' movements of the 2010s. Today, millions of students worldwide are goading politicians into addressing climate change by participating in 'Friday for Futures' protests led by Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg. As Generation Z persists in mobilising by means of digitally-enabled private realms, ensuing research must elucidate how an emotional, mediated solidarity contributes to the politicisation of young people within contemporary counter-public spheres of resistance.

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Coding Manual

Note: The contextual unit of analysis is the 100 most liked tweets (10 per MFOL co-founder) published between February 15th, 2018 and November 15th, 2018; the single unit of analysis is the individual self-written tweet (includes retweets with comments, or, 'quote tweets'). The content analysis is split into two separate stages; stage I* aims to explore the various linguistic devices featured in the tweets in order to understand who is being addressed and how, as well as the strategies used for emphasis of the activists' expressive concerns and calls to action. Stage II refers to the various types of tweets in which these linguistic devices feature and their specific rhetorical, political purposes. Categories are identified as **T1- T10**.

* In Stage I, it is important to note multiple linguistic devices will inevitably appear in the same tweet; therefore, when coding for each linguistic category, count it by focusing on the specific device you are looking for at the current time, regardless if others are present. A single tweet will therefore represent more than one category.

Stage I: Linguistic Devices

T1: Personal & Possessive Pronouns

1 = I, I'm, My
Tweets referring to the activists talking about themselves and about their own thoughts, actions, and concerns, as well as their ownership/control over certain things/people.

   a. *I VOTED on my 18th birthday!*

   b. *I had a dream that Marco Rubio stopped tweeting Bible verses and actually tried stopping his constituents from getting shot.*

   c. *#IwillMarch so no child has to lose their innocence like we did. #IwillMarch so my children don't have to experience what we all went through. #Iwillmarch because my generation – the mass shooting generation – has had enough.*

2 = We, We're, Us, Our(s)
Tweets referring to the activists talking about themselves as a collective; as the group of young leaders of the 'March for Our Lives' movement, as well as part of the wider Generation Z (people born between 1994-2010) population. Also refers to their collective ownership/control over certain things/people.

   a. *How could they do that to us? Are you kidding me?? #NeverAgain. We are not forgetting this come midterm elections – the anger that I feel right now is indescribable.*

b. *I understand a lot of people feel threatened by teenagers because <u>we're</u> trying to encourage common sense gun laws, but please know, <u>we</u> are not here to harm you. <u>We</u> are here because <u>we've</u> seen this pattern before, and <u>we</u> know that ignoring guns is not the solution.*

c. *A message to Generation Z: This is <u>our</u> election to win. This is <u>our</u> time to protect <u>ourselves</u>, <u>our</u> friends and <u>our</u> families. This is <u>our</u> moment to make history. We have 4 days. Vote.*

3 = He, She, They, Them, Their(s)

Tweets referring to the activists talking about individuals other than themselves in the 3rd person; this includes the following groups of people:

- o **The opposition:** tweets must refer to either politicians, the NRA and their representatives, or members of the media

  a. *Politicians are not going to know what hit <u>them</u> this November #TheYoungPeopleWillWin*

  b. *And <u>they</u> thought we were only capable at eating Tide pods #NationalWalkoutDay*

  c. *Three months have passed. The media has stopped talking about the shooting…same as <u>they</u> did Las Vegas, Pulse and Sandy Hook.*

- o **The Shooter:** reference to the perpetrator who carried out the shooting

  a. *<u>He</u> deserves no attention. Here's who does.* [lists names of the Parkland shooting victims]

- o **Others:** tweets including specific individuals or groups of individuals personally affected by gun violence, and those who are advocating for its prevention

  a. *I don't know <u>them</u>, but I have so much respect for <u>them</u>*

  b. *I've seen so many young girls on my feed standing up for what <u>they</u> believe in, even if <u>they</u> are standing alone.*

  c. *<u>They</u> came to see the real leaders of this country. #MarchforOurLives*

4 = You, You're, Your

Tweets referring to the activists addressing certain individuals directly. This may include their opposition, Generation Z (this category to also include young victims affected by gun violence). Below is a breakdown:

- o **The opposition:** tweets must refer to either politicians, the NRA or members of the news media

    a. *@marcorubio <u>your</u> Twitter header says "Safer America" in it. <u>You</u> have done nothing to secure our safety. Stick to <u>your</u> promise or we will vote <u>you</u> out.*

    b. *A civilian who carries a gun is currently holding dozens of people hostage in #SilverLake. What do <u>you</u> think about that, NRA?*

    c. *After Feb 14th every single reporter asked me "what can we do to help." I'll tell <u>you</u> EXACTLY what to do. Cover every single tragedy in Chicago, Baltimore, Liberty City, etc. Stop with the bullshit and only covering tragedies when its white kids getting shot.*

o **Generation Z:** tweets must directly address the following; kids, young people, youngest, youth, teenagers, Generation Z, Millennials, students, minors, victims, the age 18 and *'we' (* Include 'we' if the tweet is referring to the MFOL activists and their belonging to a larger group of young American citizens).

    a. *Attention all minors: if <u>you</u> are registered to vote and turn 18 before the November election <u>you</u> can vote in the primaries!!*

    b. *To every kid asking how <u>you</u> can support the movement: if <u>you</u> can, when <u>you</u> can, vote. Vote those taking money from the NRA out of office. Vote on every level. Keep corrupt politicians from EVER making it to the national level. That is <u>your</u> responsibility.*

    c. *Santa Fe, <u>you</u> didn't deserve this. <u>You</u> deserve peace all of your lives, not just after a tombstone saying that is placed over <u>you</u>. <u>You</u> deserve more than Thoughts and Prayers, and after supporting us by walking out, we will be there to support <u>you</u> by raising up <u>your</u> voices.*

T2: Modality

5 =   **Should, Could, Would, Must, Will, Can, May, Have to, Want to, Need to**
Tweets possessing the following modal verbs to express obligation, ability, necessity, likelihood, possibility and to stress the general importance of carrying out certain actions:

    a. *The young people <u>will</u> win. Young voters make up a significant portion of new registrations in key states since Parkland.*

    b. *How many times do kids <u>have to</u> beg to not go through this before something is done? How long do we <u>have to</u> wait to stop being ignored?*

    c. *We are doing this for the 17 innocent lives that were unjustly lost. We are doing this so that no other town has to be turned into a cemetery because of a mass shooting. We <u>need to</u> be the change. We <u>NEED to</u> do it for them.*

T3: Overlexicalisation

6 =   **Repetition of the same word, name, phrase and/or hashtag *at least* twice**

Tweets possessing repetition of any kind in an individual tweet

 a. _We are the future (x11). When the future votes, the future wins, the young people will win._

 b. _The 2nd Amendment didn't protect the 110,000+ American citizens who were detained in camps during WWII. The 2nd Amendment doesn't protect the countless American citizens gunned down unjustly by police. We aren't doing enough to protect American citizens. We demand change._

 c. _At least 8 students have been shot and killed at Santa Fe High School. Prepare to watch the NRA boast about getting higher donations. Prepare to see students rise up and be called 'civil terrorists' and crisis actors. Prepare to see the right-wing media attack the survivors._

T4: Metaphor & Symbols

7 = Discursive and iconographical metaphorical/symbolic references
Tweets containing metaphorical and symbolic language and/or images pertaining to Generation Z and gun violence prevention. Must refer to the following:

 o **Colour orange:** the colour symbolising gun violence prevention and awareness

 a. _Screw red, screw blue. For my first time participating in any election, I commit to voting orange this November, so I don't have to fear losing anymore to gun violence. #OrangeWaveinNovember_

 b. _On Scott Beigel's 36th birthday, I added my drop to the orange wave. #VoteForOurLives_

 c. _I walked out so far, I ended up in NY! Remembering Columbine today in our moments of silence, in servicing our communities, and in loving each other. Orange is the color for gun violence survivors, and we wear it today in solidarity of another._

 o **$1.05 cents:** this price represents the amount of funding Florida's Republican Senator Marco Rubio has received from the NRA to finance his re-election campaigns, divided by the number of students enrolled in the Florida public/private school system.

 a. _You can too Rubio, by denouncing the NRA or resigning. I'll gladly pay the $1.05 for you to do so. Denounce them and join the revolution, for you know how these people at the NRA scare and manipulate politicians far more than anyone._

 b. _What if my life was priceless? What if my life was worth more than $1.05? For every student enrolled in a Florida school, Marco Rubio takes $1.05 from the NRA. Is that all we are worth to you, Senator Rubio? The NRA is not on our side. Don't let them silence our voice._

- **Snowflakes:** a derogatory term used to describe Generation Z and Millennial individuals as easily offended, overly emotional and possessing an inflated sense of self-importance.

    a. *People call us <u>snowflakes</u>. But what happens when all the <u>snowflakes</u> vote? That's called an <u>avalanche</u>.*

Stage II: Purposes of Tweets

T5: Motivating Youth Engagement and Political Participation

8 =   Young peoples' participation in political activities aimed at ending gun violence
Tweets should refer to the following: kids, teenagers, young people, youngest, youth, Generation Z, Millennials, students, minors, victims, the age 18 and *'we' (* Include 'we' if the tweet is referring to the MFOL activists and their belonging to a larger group of young American citizens). In addition, any of the above words must be accompanied by the following lexical references to political participation and engagement: rally, 'National Student Walkout', walking, vote, voting, voter(s), voted, march, marching, registered, register, revolution, win, winning, elected, midterms, elections, November, laws, boycotting, ballot, protest(s), as well as metaphorical language and symbolism i.e. orange, $1.05, snowflakes etc.

    a. *The REAL way to scare politicians and spark change is to <u>register</u> to <u>vote</u> and actually follow through with it. <u>Ages 18 </u>to <u>29</u> have the least number of <u>registered voters</u>. They're not doing anything because they think we won't show up to the <u>ballot</u> boxes in <u>November</u>. #getoutand<u>vote</u>*

    b. *<u>We</u> don't need Democrats or Republicans to be <u>elected,</u> <u>we</u> need fucking human beings that actually give a shit about <u>kids</u> dying. <u>Elect</u> human beings NOT career politicians.*

    c. *The #<u>VoteForOurLives</u> tour is coming to an end soon…but we're not done yet. Tomorrow we'll be in Orange County, CA <u>rallying</u> with UC Irvine <u>students</u> and bussing them to <u>vote</u>. See you soon, OC!*

T6: Accounts of Personal Testimony

9 =   The activists recounting their own experiences of the shooting at their school
Tweets affirming the student activists' authority to discuss their encounters with gun violence as they were first-hand witnesses, whereas politicians were not. Language such as 'being shot at', 'murdered', 'school', 'shooting', 'Parkland', and 'February 14th' should be accompanied by personal and possessive pronouns such as *I*, *we* and *our* to make salient that these experiences are personal to each victim of this specific school-shooting.

    a. *<u>We</u> are KIDS, not actors. <u>We</u> are KIDS that have grown up in <u>Parkland</u> all of our lives. <u>We</u> are KIDS who feared for <u>our lives</u> while someone <u>shot up our school</u>. <u>We</u> are KIDS working to prevent this from <u>happening again</u>. WE ARE KIDS.*

b. *If <u>we</u> had clear backpacks the entire year, the only thing about <u>February 14th</u> that would've gone differently is that <u>we</u> would have had clear backpacks.*

c. *To the politicians saying this isn't about guns, and that <u>we</u> shouldn't be discussing this right now: <u>We were</u> literally <u>being shot at</u> while trying to gain an education, so this is about guns. <u>You weren't in the school</u> while this was happening, <u>we were</u>, and <u>we're</u> demanding change.*

T7: Addressing the Opposition Directly

10 = The activists directly addressing politicians, the NRA and the news media
Tweets must address politicians, the NRA and the news media directly by using specific names [i.e. Senator Marco Rubio, news anchor Laura Ingraham, and NRA representative Dana Loesch], or as a collective [i.e. Republicans, Democrats, politicians, the media, and NRA] using variants of the personal pronoun *you* such as *you're* and *your*. Quote tweets containing the opposition's discourse within the tweet – accompanied by the retaliatory, antagonistic remarks of the activists – **must** be included.

a. *Just a reminder that <u>Trump</u> promised to federally ban bump stocks after the Parkland shooting. But he NEVER signed an executive order or law about it. Thanks for <u>your</u> empty promises <u>@realDonaldTrump</u>. ***

   *(This quote tweet contains a video of President Trump assuring the media he would 'personally' ban bump stocks. The activist addresses the President directly by tweeting @ his Twitter handle)

b. *<u>@NRA,</u> instead of promoting <u>your</u> gear tell everyone to support safe storage laws, universal background checks for private sales, mandatory gun safety training, disarming domestic abusers, red flag laws, child access prevention laws, gun violence research. #WearOrange*

c. *<u>Rubio</u>, so glad to know you support the suppression of over 300,000 voters. ***

   *(This quote tweet is a response to Senator Marco Rubio declaring his support for fellow Republican Brian Kemp and his campaign for governor of Georgia)

T8: Criticism of the Opposition

11 = The activists' criticism of politicians, the NRA and the news media
The following tweets criticise the inaction of these oppositional factions *without* addressing them directly through the use of quote tweets, personal pronouns or specific names; rather, these tweets are general vocalisations of disapproval intended to convince the activists' supporters of the opposition's passivity and their lack of concern toward victims of gun violence.

a. *"Thoughts and prayers" only seem to apply from a distance, huh? <u>A judge</u> must confront the issues in this country, not run away from a disturbing reality. Jamie deserves better, Fred deserves better. We deserve better.*

b. *Let's make a deal DO NOT come to Florida for spring break unless gun legislation is passed. <u>These politicians</u> won't listen to survivors so maybe <u>they'll listen</u> to the billion-dollar tourism industry in FL. #NeverAgain*

c. *Simply put, <u>politicians do not care</u> about our generation because young people don't vote and that's a huge reason why we have the <u>student debt problem</u>, <u>environmental problems</u> and <u>gun violence</u> because we show our political leaders that they <u>can get away with what they want</u>. NO MORE.*

T9: Praising the Movement's Success

12 =   The activists' praise of their own accomplishments and of young peoples' active political participation in the movement
Tweets mentioning the successful outcomes of the MFOL movement, such as higher rates of youth voter registration and turnout in the November 2018 midterm elections. This includes references to the MFOL movement, to making history, voting figures, exclamations of pride, and passing gun laws. The activists speak as a collective or address their peers directly, while also claiming the credit themselves for achieving these results.

a. *<u>You all</u> fucking rock and I love each one of you with my full heart. Thank you for <u>making history</u> with the <u>highest youth voter turnout</u> in a <u>midterm</u> in the past 25 years. This is just the beginning. <u>We</u> will not stop until <u>we</u> end gun violence in America*

b. *Do <u>you</u> understand that this is currently the greatest and <u>youngest voter registration</u> push in <u>American history</u>?? More people have registered in the last 10 days than any other 10-day period in <u>AMERICAN HISTORY</u>. <u>You'll</u> see all of them <u>November 6th</u>!*

c. *<u>We</u> really spearheaded the <u>highest youth turnout</u> in <u>American history</u>...a bunch of <u>meddling kids</u>...<u>we</u> fucking got this.*

T10: Other
Tweets with an unclear function or representing a function not listed in this manual should be coded as 'Other'.

Appendix B

Tweets referenced in Foucauldian MCDA [Section 4]

Figure 1: *Sarahchadwickk*. 2018. [Twitter]. 16 February. [Accessed 6 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/Sarahchadwickk/status/964564393064390663

Figure 2: *delaneytarr*. 2018. [Twitter]. 8 March. [Accessed 8 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/delaneytarr/status/971946338488344576

Figure 3: *JaclynCorin*. 2018. [Twitter]. 18 May. [Accessed 8April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/JaclynCorin/status/997498593241116674

Figure 4: *AAlhanti*. 2018. [Twitter]. 9 April. [Accessed 8 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/AAlhanti/status/983330089080377344

Figure 5: *emma4change*. 2018. [Twitter]. 4 March. [Accessed 9 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/Emma4Change/status/970300504122081280

Figure 6: *al3xw1nd*. 2018. [Twitter]. 1 April. [Accessed 9 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/al3xw1nd/status/980660418959101952

Figure 7: *cameron_kasky*. 2018. [Twitter]. 5 October. [Accessed 9 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/cameron_kasky/status/1048311423829463040

Figure 8: *emma4change*. 2018. [Twitter]. 20 April. [Accessed 9 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/Emma4Change/status/987332843536871424

Figure 9: *al3xw1nd*. 2018. [Twitter]. 21 February. [Accessed 9 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/al3xw1nd/status/966396182107971584

Figure 10: *MattxRed*. 2018. [Twitter]. 14 May. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/MattxRed/status/995984330513174528

Figure 11: *davidhogg111*. 2018. [Twitter]. 26 May. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/davidhogg111/status/1000552797106995200

Figure 12: *MattxRed*. 2018. [Twitter]. 7 November. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/MattxRed/status/1060153615745196033

Figure 13: *cameron_kasky*. 2018. [Twitter]. 29 June. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/cameron_kasky/status/1012712413467152385

Figure 14: *AAlhanti*. 2018. [Twitter]. 5 March. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/AAlhanti/status/970785636402769920

Figure 15: *John_Barnitt*. 2018. [Twitter]. 16 March. [Accessed 11 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/John_Barnitt/status/974685117716279300

Figure 16: *JaclynCorin*. 2018. [Twitter]. 20 February. [Accessed 11 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/JaclynCorin/status/966081269326020608

Figure 17: *Sarahchadwickk*. 2018. [Twitter]. 23 February. [Accessed 11 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/Sarahchadwickk/status/967088933795454976

Figure 18: *John_Barnitt*. 2018. [Twitter]. 14 March. [Accessed 12 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/John_Barnitt/status/973968073517682688

Figure 19: *davidhogg111*. 2018. [Twitter]. 21 April. [Accessed 12 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/davidhogg111/status/987782052501245953

Figure 20: *delaneytarr*. 2018. [Twitter]. 2 April. [Accessed 12 April 2019]. Available from: https://twitter.com/delaneytarr/status/981005115623657472