

Representing the Political Self
The Fronts We Display and The Dissonance We Create

by

Julia R. Buschmann

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Julia R. Buschmann has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Sociology.

Michelle Janning

Whitman College
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INTRODUCTION

As a young adult born in 1994, I began my foray into social media in middle school, when my college-aged sister informed me that Facebook was “the new Myspace;” I obliged and created an account. The last eight years have allowed me a casual, though deeply embedded, participant observation within Facebook, the social networking site (SNS) that has had a presence in the lives of many. While immersed in the wonder of digital social connectivity, I have unquestionably experienced a reshaping of what Sherry Turkle refers to as the “architecture of our intimacies,” as advancing technologies facilitate social connection without the demands of friendship (2012:1). I am a part of a group that scholars refer to as the first generation of “digital natives” (Milkman 2016:1), the young adults that came of age concurrent to the rise of internet based technologies and have been shaped by its presence while naturally accustomed to its utility. To us, our lives naturally exist in tandem to the technologies that accommodate access to the Internet and SNSs.

Ruth Milkman argues that the advent of social media and post-recession labor market precarity has fostered a “new political generation” among the already socially and politically distinct Millennials (2016:1). “Unparalleled expertise” in deploying social media, along with “progressive attitudes”, disprove assumptions that Millennials are politically disengaged (Milkman 2016:2; for an argument to the contrary, see Stein 2013). As political engagement converges with a natural ease on social media, the confluence accommodates an emergence of a political representation of the self on SNSs, which an individual can choose to develop or voluntarily leave

unacknowledged.

The act of volunteering an online, political self-representation became particularly salient on November 9th, 2016, the day after the presidential election. I read a Facebook post written by a Facebook friend who is an activist and social justice leader in the Seattle area. Her post sought to inform “anyone with a uterus” about the impending uncertainty in women’s access to reproductive control, brought about by the new administration’s overhaul of health insurance. As a young woman who willingly engages in and initiates offline conversations about access to reproductive control, openly sharing experiences and thoughts, I wholeheartedly agreed with her post. I then encountered a personal dilemma. Do I like it? Do I share her post? Do I share the article that she shared and confide to others my own thoughts on the matter? After all, I want my friends to be informed and also empower them to take action on behalf of their own reproductive control while “women’s health”ⁱ is still required to be covered by insurance.

In the end, I clicked a single button to like it. Through this decision, I intentionally refrained from developing a political representation of myself on Facebook. My impact was minimal, and only gave a subtle affirmation of my support. Though I consider myself a politically aware and moderately active individual, this version of my self does not appear on my Facebook profile or the interactions I engage with in online social spaces. It is this dissonance between an offline presentation and online representation which influences the types of politically oriented conversations, information, and discourses that find their way onto Facebook. This SNS becomes a socio-political space, where Facebook users can utilize political discourses as a strategy

of representing themselves as political participants. However, not all Facebook users do. The potential for dissonance between one's offline political participation and online political self-representation supports a worthwhile study into the motivations and behaviors that individuals carry into the development of their self-representation on Facebook, as it occurs through the employment of politically oriented information and discourses.

This thesis seeks to explore the motivations that compel employment of and resistance to politically oriented issues and discourses in the construction of an individual's Facebook profile, an act of self-representation and "impression management" (Goffman 1959:208) which occurs through online materials. Offline political participation can be a committed priority, and yet can remain unrepresented on their Facebook profile, the space to share photos, interests, and experiences with their friends. One's awareness of political discourses is sometimes made very apparent on their profile, which, as this research shows, can occur in contrast to their level of offline political activity.

Existing literature on self-representation practices on Facebook has not considered the specific motivations that inspire individuals' development of self-representations through political discourse. This study attempts to fill that gap. In the following three sections, I combine a discussion of theory and relevant literature to situate my framework and interpretation of self-representation on Facebook through political participation. In the first section, I look at how the Internet reconfigured social life, paying attention to danah boyd's prolific scholarship (2008; 2010; 2014) on SNSs, specifically her work on "networked publics." I then shift into a discussion of SNSs

and the features of Facebook that have afforded it an increasingly prominent presence in the lives of its users. I will then establish one of my theoretical frameworks with a review of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory and consider its application to self-representation in online social spaces. In chapter two, I discuss Lester Milbrath's (1965) hierarchy of political participation, new forms of political action, and political participation as related to "clicktivism" (Dewey 2014; Halupka 2014; Rotman 2011). It is in the third chapter that I consider how democratic ideals can become realized in online social spaces through the development of an online political self-representation.

The methodology section describes my research design, operationalization of variables, and the framework of my analysis. In the findings section I examine the various methods of political participation that my interview population engages with, it is here that I present an adapted version of Lester Milbrath's (1965) hierarchy of political participation and discuss the four diverse groups of offline and online political participation that emerged from interviews, supplementing with survey data when relevant. My findings suggest another emergent aspect of political action: symbolic meaning accompanies political participation, which drives the adoption of, and significant opposition to, this material as substance for self-representation on Facebook. I conclude with thoughts on the greater implications of these findings and consider what it means when political participation is driven by self-image.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF ENGAGEMENT: SNSs AS MEDIATED PUBLICS

The Internet provides a “network of networks” that generates new methods for us, as users, to create, receive, and distribute information while also influencing our strategies for integrating this technology into our social world (Graham 2014:viii). It is both shaped by the needs and desires of society while also shaping the social interactions that configure society. Through its interconnectedness, the Internet “weaves the fabric of our lives,” and restructures our social relationships (Graham 2014:v). In this chapter, I explore the intricate ways that the Internet and Internet-based technologies influence the organization of social interaction through networked publics and how the emergence of social networking sites (SNSs) accommodated a restructuring of social life and relationships. In the latter half of this chapter, I consider Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical theory alone and as it relates to self-representation on Facebook.

Once the Internet emerged its use was largely restricted to those who could afford the technology, inhibiting widespread use. It wasn’t until the 1990s when access to computer-based technology widened and more people, across socioeconomic status lines, could engage with the capabilities and communication that it afforded. The Internet was met with skepticism by some, but was generally considered to “[enrich] lives” (Klotz 2004:37) with quick access to communication platforms (such as email), news sources, shopping, information about health or interests, and numerous other activities (Marichal 2012).

In *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle aptly noted that modern technology has become the “architecture of our intimacies” in its restructuring of our social relationshipsⁱⁱ (2011:1). “Digital connections” (Turkle 2011:1) offer a source of affirmation and connection, while existing in a space where an individual is able to control their interaction with others and their response to online materials. We gain discretion in the information that we choose to reveal and have “more control” over our relationships (Turkle 2011:17). When relating through technology, people lose a sense of uncertainty or fear that social interaction can impose. Vulnerabilities lose their hold when we can more carefully shape our representation through online social networking platforms or through text based communications. Though this might lessen the demands of social interaction or friendship, we become better equipped to hide our more intimate selves while still appearing as socially present and benefiting from “connection.”

A Network of Connections

Early on, the Internet was broadly considered as an “external add on” to an individual’s offline social life (Marichal 2012:3). This could have been due to the numerous virtual sites that allowed a user to develop a house, family, or life that was perhaps unrealistic in their offline reality. However, with the advent of SNSs, the potential for dissonance between an individual’s online and offline life dissipated as online connections became rooted in one’s offline social networks. danah boyd has extensively studied the emergence of SNSs and their rise in popularity since the early 2000’s; I employ her definition here. Social network sites are defined as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a common connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (boyd and Ellison 2008:211).

Following this definition, boyd makes a critical distinction between a ‘social networking site’ and a ‘social network site’: using the word “networking” implies the initiation of a relationship, which is likely to occur between strangers (2008:211).

Though networking occurs, it is not the primary purpose for engaging with a number of these sites. The word “network” implies an already existing offline connection that is now made visible online. Though the latter is very true, I will continue using the term ‘social networking sites’ because I consider the interpersonal negotiation of self-representation to be a consistent and on-going process that continually influences the strategy for self-representation an individual chooses when interacting with their social network. In shaping their self-representation, whether through maintenance or a re-framing of their self, they are continually re-working their engagement with their social network, effectively re-networking with the connections they have already made.

Each SNS provides a unique “networked public” (boyd 2010:39), defined as a public that is “restructured by network technologies” (boyd 2014:8). It is both a “space constructed through networked technologies” and the “imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (boyd 2010:39). Similar to other types of publics, a networked public offers space for people to gather for social, cultural, or political purposes and connect with friends and family. No matter where, a public is a location where social connection occurs.

The architecture of social connection and interaction facilitated by both modern technologies and the advent of SNSs offers a restructured mode of engagement. This does not dictate someone's behavior but structures, and therefore constrains, the social interaction made possible by the SNS's properties and format. A new social dynamic emerges and is shaped by three properties: invisible audiences: in online spaces a person is unaware of who is, and who is not, taking in their performance; collapsed contexts: disparate social groups come together in a single space; and, the blurring of public and private: people must negotiate undefined boundaries in online networked spaces (boyd 2010). Collectively, these shape the characteristics of social interaction and transform the *public* that we inhabit.

Facebook's Nomenclature of Interaction

People self-select into the networked public that they seek engagement with. In this thesis, I look specifically at Facebook due to its lack of entrance barriers, which has allowed for widespread adoption while previous SNSs premised membership on a shared demographic identity, interest, or activity.

Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 and originally restricted to those with a harvard.edu email address (Marichal 2012). Within the next year, the site was made accessible at other selective universities, which kept it functioning as relatively closed and contributed to the perception that the site was an "intimate, private community" (boyd and Ellison 2008:218). In 2005, Facebook was opened up to anyone with an 'edu' email address, high school students, and corporate networks. In

2006 Facebook went public, with the minor restrictions that a Facebook user must have an email address and be over the age of thirteen (Marichal 2012).

The youth were the early adopters of Facebook and still comprise the majority of the users. In a study of various SNSs, the Pew Research Center (2017) found that adults ages 18-29 were 88% likely to use Facebook, while the average for all online adults was 66%. Concerning other SNSs, this study found that online adults ages 18-29 were 59% likely to have an Instagram account, 36% likely to use Twitter, and 34% likely to have a LinkedIn profile, indicating that though other SNSs are available Facebook retains a dominant presence (2017).

Once publicly accessible, Facebook quickly gained momentum and widespread popularity, excelling where previous SNSs were unable to gain traction. On the surface, it utilizes offline social networks instead of groupings based on a singular characteristic or interest (boyd and Ellison 2008). Its real allure lies in its open format that “encourages,” but doesn’t force, a user to reveal information and represent their self, all while appealing to our desire for social connection (Marichal 2012:2). A status update allows for us to selectively convey information about ourselves to our friends, the hand-picked online community that we have created, which gives us agency not only in how we represent ourselves, but also the people that see our representation. The ‘newsfeed’, Facebook’s space for organizing the recent activity of both people and pages, creates an “online environment where revealing information is seen as part of a natural process of relationship building” (Marichal 2012:9). It is this choice architecture that distinguishes Facebook. Where other SNSs require that an individual

disclose personal or sensitive information, Facebook merely encourages it and users volunteer.

On its own page, Facebook states that its mission is to, “give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected,” not only to family and friends, but to the greater issues in the world (Facebook 2004). Facebook users are able to “express what matters to them” and are encouraged to share their concerns and thoughts. This is a crucial part of the equation that, along with the choice architecture, differentiates Facebook as a site of identity construction from other SNSs and offline reality. While it is rooted in our offline social networks, one’s Facebook profile is able to function as an alternative site for developing a representation of one’s ‘self.’ The following section seeks to elucidate this distinction in self-representation that occurs when confronted with Facebook’s structure of social interaction.

The ‘Facebook Self’

“If Facebook were deleted, I’d be deleted... All my memories would probably go along with it. And other people have posted pictures of me. All of that would be lost. If Facebook were undone, I might actually freak out... That is where I am. It’s part of your life. It’s a second you.”

- Audrey, 16 (Turkle 2011:192)

Though melodramatic, the above quote offers insight into how one’s ‘self’ on Facebook can exist as distinct to their, suddenly alternative, offline self. This accommodates an “identity play” (Turkle 2014:179) where online materials become tools to generate another version of the self, seen in a user’s profile, where they can share information about themselves or interests as they choose (Feezell et al. 2009). It contains basic information (e.g. age, hometown, university) volunteered by the user, while also being home to any pre-existing online materials, such as a news article, that

a user has shared on their profile. They can exhibit photo albums created by themselves and also decide which tagged photos posted by other friends they want to appear on their wall. A user is also able to write a self-description in their ‘about me’ section, list their favorite quotes, and like pages that suit their interests. The material that appears on a profile is approved and attended to by the user and can be deleted from a profile at any time.

With an open format that spurs participation (Marichal 2012), Facebook furnishes another location for its users to develop their identity. When executed, this culminates in a constructed ‘Facebook self’, a self-representation that exists in conjunction to one’s offline self. Users are required to use their real nameⁱⁱⁱ and are encouraged to post their own photos, ‘check in’ to offline events, and tag photos of other friends^{iv}. Through each decision to reveal or not, we exercise control in our ability to choose our portrayal. The version of our self that we develop is a representation of our offline self, as we filter it through the structured disclosure that Facebook provides.

This is perhaps a natural result of SNSs and modern technology becoming increasingly embedded in daily life: we gain another location of identity work and management of the ‘self’ (Robards and Bennet 2011). The public nature of SNSs makes identity construction and development more apparent, since online people have to “consciously create their digital presence” (boyd 2014: 37). Through virtual locations people are freed from the physical co-presence previously required to engage in social interaction, a separation that has “expanded the array of generalized others contributing to the construction of the self” (Cerulo 1997:386). An individual is able to

interact, more or less, through a single post with every one of their friends on Facebook. However, this “array of generalized others” are only able to interpret the information that one chooses to provide. The capacity for self-selection allows for one to conceptualize of the self they enact before interaction has occurred. Consequently, one is able to shape their online identity while interacting with only the idea of another. This presentation of the self (Goffman 1959) takes place in a social space where we are able to create, develop, and organize the stories we tell about ourselves in a way that is impossible in offline social situations (Kendall 1998), as representation online differs from presentation offline (Enli and Thumim 2012). Ultimately, social media platforms provide an alternative structure for negotiating, communicating, and representing someone’s offline identity.

In *Negotiating Identity*, Scott defines identity as the “set of integrated ideas about the self,” characterized by the qualities that make us unique (2015:2). There is a duality between one’s identity, a sense of oneself, and identification, the process of categorizing oneself as similar or different from others. This introduces a relational component to identity: we define who we are in contrast to who we are not (Scott 2015). Materials are used to differentiate our presentation from others.

Facebook produces new formats of socializing through its modes of selecting, organizing, and presenting information, which, in turn, shape the dynamic of social activity and interaction (Altheide 1995). SNSs provide a “*different way* to intertwine reality and imagination in the construction of identity” (Durante 2011:595). The culminating representation of self that we see in someone’s Facebook profile is the result of “a selection of information that forges a *meaningful difference* between what

we wish to unfold and what we wish to keep secret” (Durante 2011:596). SNSs, such as Facebook, exemplify a space where one has the agency and ability to select which information to provide and which to withhold, and create a narrative accordingly. Using Erving Goffman’s theory, we possess a greater degree of “dramaturgical discipline” (1959:216) with our heightened control over our constructed image. Considering this employment of online materials in methods of self-representation, Goffman’s dramaturgical theory continues to be relevant to understanding the self that we construct on Facebook, as the following section describes.

Goffman’s “Presentation” Meets Facebook’s “Representation”

Our ‘Facebook self’ is a representation of our self. As a byproduct of Facebook’s choice architecture (Marichal 2012), discussed earlier in this chapter, there is an inherent difference in the representation developed on Facebook and the presentation we reveal offline (Enli and Thumim 2012). The Facebook self is developed on a user’s ‘profile,’ where they are encouraged to share personal information, thoughts, photos, or articles to their hand picked friends. In the process of making a self-representation, by creating a self-descriptive profile and making social connections visible, an individual actively “makes choices about what aspects of the self to represent and how to represent them” (Enli and Thumim 2012:91).

The Facebook self, the self-representation we develop on Facebook, can be understood using Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach to identity and performance. Goffman proposed that social life is a theatre and our performance is the construction of the social self we convey in relation to another (1959). The individual

is not isolated from the social matrix in which they are embedded, but they develop their self within it (Scheff 2006). In dramaturgical terms, social interactions provide the stage and individuals develop their act accordingly. Social actors present different characters depending on the audience and project a desired impression, all while performing the behaviors to maintain it. This act of “impression management” (Goffman 1959:208), and its various techniques, allows the actor to control the image of self they convey to their audience. An identity is “performative” (Scott 2015:16) and situated within a specific social context, it is here that information is tactfully disclosed or displayed to form a desired presentation.

This performance is referred to as an actor’s “front” (Goffman 1959:107), which “may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards.” This is where a social actor publicly performs and enacts the information or displays that they seek to convey about their self. The front an actor displays is contingent upon the social “setting” (location, scenery) and the “personal front” that an actor carries (clothes, sex, facial expressions) (Scott 2015:17). These characteristics are “vehicles for conveying signs” (1959:24) about the actor, and can differ from one performance to the next. Performers may offer an idealized impression of their front, for instance, a performance may “tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole” (1959:35). Our presentations express the moral values of our community, which we employ to signal status. Meanwhile, the “backstage” (1959:112) exists as a reprieve from the front as space for an actor to relax and practice their self-presentation. In management of one’s impression, the backstage

is out of view of audience members. On Facebook, our front takes the form of our profile while the backstage is our space for contemplation of future methods of performance in light of our current self-representation previously cultivated with online materials.

A presentation depends on the social setting and the audience anticipated by the actor. In coupling the public and the private, Facebook furnishes an alternative stage for us to develop our online identity. As Enli and Thumim argue, “in order to participate in online social networking, and we take the example of Facebook, individuals have no choice but to represent themselves” (2012:88). We are able to represent who we think we are or who we want to be through our development of a Facebook profile, which is not as straightforward as one might assume. There are spaces to write about yourself, other spaces to showcase your favorite bands, and another section lists the events you’ve recently attended. Decisions must be made about which photos to upload or whether to enter your political affiliation. There is room to perform, but to whom?

On Facebook, a user has an “imagined audience” that differs from their offline audience in the “quasi-public” online space (Baym 2012:323). Though we gain the ability to network with all of our offline connections, they come together in a single social space. Here, we experience “context collapse” (Marwick and boyd 2014:1054; Baym 2012:323; boyd 2014:31). People generally vary their presentation by context and audience (Goffman 1959), but Facebook upends the boundaries that exist offline and dissipates partitions between social groups. A person may think they’re posting to only the people that usually comment on or ‘like’ their material, while there are

actually many more people seeing the post. This encountering between previously separate groups and norms is experienced, by some, as a loss of privacy (Marwick and boyd 2014) because they are unable to strategically portray oneself differently to each distinct audience through impression management (Goffman 1959).

With context collapse, a Facebook user must be aware of how their presentation of self is modified by the structured engagement and interaction on the SNS. However, a Facebook user can enact their increased control to curate an online identity, which could let someone build on their offline identity or assert an alternative, perhaps lesser known, element of their self (boyd 2010). On Facebook, a user is able to “actively craft their profiles to be seen by others...an explicit act of writing oneself into the digital environment” (boyd 2010:4). A deceptive construction of a ‘Facebook self’ is possible, but perhaps less likely, when considering the audience is comprised of offline social connections. People are compelled to self-monitor the information they use to construct their online self, as it must be consistent with their offline performance. However, there is room for misrepresentation on behalf of the actor, which the audience recognizes. Goffman writes, “it is natural for us to feel that the impression the performer seeks to give may be true or false” (1959:58), as characteristics of performance can be manipulated to utilize specific “symbols of status” to be associated with the performer. A “false front” (1959:59) can indicate a discrepancy with reality, and reveals a performer as an “imposter.”

Though Goffman developed his dramaturgical theory before the advent of Internet based communication technologies, such as e-mail or Facebook, his theoretical framework is well situated for interpreting identity work on Facebook. As an online

space, Facebook is inherently a representation of our self, and we are able to choose which self to reveal, as it may differ from the presentation we reveal offline. The resulting “performance” (Goffman 1959:106) is a self that we have curated with a specific audience in mind. This self on Facebook becomes another front. We exist as social actors online, just as we do offline, but we gain “control” (boyd 2008:222) and discretion in our ability to consider which characteristics of our representation to disclose. A Facebook user is not simply presenting their self as they do offline, but actively shaping, maintaining, and performing a representation of their self.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: OLD AND NEW

In defining what is political it might be more straightforward to specify what is not. That is to say, many things fall under this umbrella term. “Politics” are the activities related to the governance of a country, the debate of power between parties, and the ideological principles related to power and status (Oxford Dictionary). As an adjective, “political” relates to government and public affairs of a country, strategies of a political party or group, and can also be used to describe one’s motivation for certain beliefs (Oxford Dictionary).

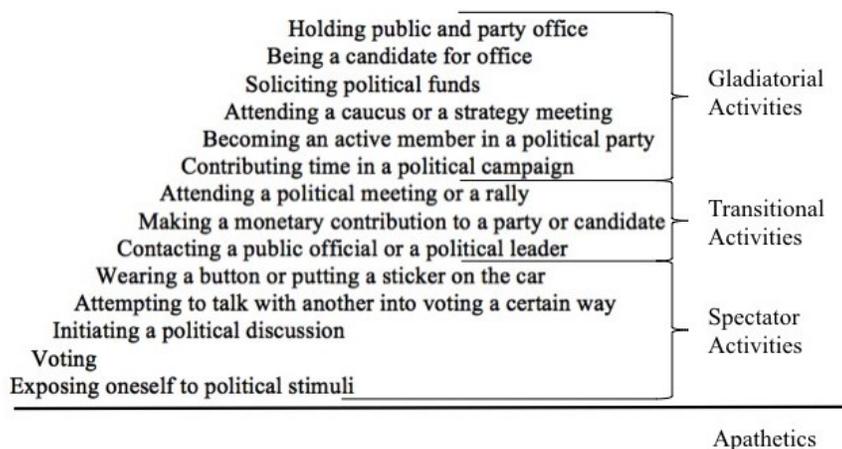
In this section, I discuss the methods that individuals use to assert their voice in political matters. I begin with Lester Milbrath’s scholarship on methods of political participation and subdimensions of political action, which connects motivation to effort. However, this model leaves out new and meaningful methods of political participation. Therefore I continue with new forms of political participation and discuss various methods of online political participation. I conclude with a brief consideration of the motivations that prompt one to partake in political activity.

‘Political Participation’ Defined

Democratic political systems necessitate involvement from their citizenry. This manifests in political participation, which can be defined as “behavior [that] affects or is intended to affect the decisional outcomes of government” (Milbrath 1965:1). This can be seen in voting, discussion, donating to campaigns, etc. In *Political Participation*, a text written at the peak of the civil rights movement, political scientist

Lester Milbrath developed a “hierarchy of political involvement,” depicted in Figure 1 (1965:18). The decision to act in a certain way must be accompanied by a decision about the intensity and duration of the action, as it can be extreme and sustained or mild and singular (Milbrath 1965:6). Political behavior can also be framed as passive or active, with “obeying laws” and “paying taxes” considered passive compliance with the political system (Milbrath 1965:9). However, active behavior is a gradation of low-cost to high-cost methods of participation that differ by the required time, energy, and commitment that activities mandate.

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Political Involvement (Milbrath 1965:18)



By ascribing specific activities to the three levels of political action, Milbrath makes clear that this hierarchy reflects how different acts require various levels of time and energy. As a person moves up the hierarchy it is likely that they engage in the activities that characterize the lower levels as well. People can also be completely inactive, active in one type of behavior and not another, or active in a wide variety of behaviors. Political activity is also understood by “subdimensional characteristics,” listed below, that can make action attractive or unattractive to the political participant (1965:10).

Overt versus Covert: Action is characterized by its public exposure and has the possibility of both criticism and acclamation.

Autonomous versus Compliant: Action can occur as a response to a stimulus of some sort, either a specific solicitation or a general environmental stimulus. Action taken in response to a request has “passive overtones” when compared to autonomous action.

Approaching versus Avoiding: An individual partakes in a specific activity because they are generally attracted to it, what Milbrath terms a “positive valence” (11). The absence of action does not necessarily indicate avoidance; the individual must be made aware of the option before choosing to avoid acting on it.

Episodic versus Continuous: Action can be singular, such as voting, or can require a continuous time commitment. Continuous action generally has higher costs and may require a “reward structure” (11) to insure the action occurs.

Inputs versus Outtakes: Behavior is classified by the “orientations or postures” (12) that individuals hold towards their action.

Expressive versus Instrumental: This subdimension is a “motivational distinction” (12) and must be understood in context to the individual doing the action. Expressive action is generally symbolic, such as voting, while instrumental action is oriented towards causing change.

Verbal versus Nonverbal: A person must possess verbal skills (to talk about politics, write letters, etc.) before they are able to participate in this way.

Social versus Nonsocial: Action is characterized by its level of social interaction, which can act as a deterrence or incentive.

These subdimensional characteristics provide a framework for interpreting the behavioral motivations for offline political participation, but also online. Milbrath developed this hierarchical model and subdimensions in 1965 and, while it is not inaccurate, it excludes newer and notable forms of political involvement. Despite this shortcoming, Milbrath’s gradation of political involvement and terminology of subdimensional characteristics transcend technological innovation in their organization

and principle, therefore they are still quite useful. Online political participation, often referred to as ‘hashtag activism’ (Dewey 2014), ‘slacktivism’ (Thimsen 2015; Rotman et al. 2011), or ‘clicktivism’ (Halupka 2014; Karpf 2010), has become increasingly present in the everyday as technological advancements have increased the accessibility of Internet based communication platforms, convenience of social connection, and increased access to current news. Methods of political participation altered in response to the advent of the Internet, but also SNSs, which furnished myriad ways for people to engage in political participation through posting, sharing, or commenting about political or social justice issues to online platforms.

New Forms of Political Action

At its advent, it was thought that the Internet would make average citizens more active in the acquisition of political knowledge and serve as a democratic public space for anyone to “have a meaningful voice in civic discourse” (Maratea 2014:4). It was thought by some that the modified structure of participation would “allow people to speak truth to power” as barriers to participation were lowered (boyd 2008:241). In a 2005 case, the Delaware Supreme Court found that “the Internet is a unique democratizing medium” that allows “more and diverse people to engage in public debate” (Hindman 2009:3). Both citizens and politicians adopt new technologies as vehicles of political participation and action. Barack Obama’s success in the 2008 presidential election has been largely attributed to his campaign’s use of social networking sites to capture the youth vote (Fox 2012). His strategy relied on the youth’s presence on SNSs, which his successful election to office proved.

Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube spread information in different forms but serve as interactive sites of political engagement, contrasting from television or radio which characterized prior methods of political news transmission. When considering the impact of the Internet on mass political participation and strategy, Matthew Hindman writes, “changing the *infrastructure* that supports participation can alter the *patterns* of participation” (2009:16). The democratization of access has proven to be true as SNSs have become locations of political participation, as the following section describes.

By The Numbers

A 2016 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that political debate and discussion are a “regular fact of digital life” for social media users (Duggan and Smith). About a third of users see this platform as an opportunity to engage in a “heated discussion,” but a larger portion experience aggravation and annoyance at the tone and the content of the politically oriented interactions they witness (Duggan and Smith 2016). Seventy nine percent of online adult Americans use Facebook (Greenwood et al. 2016) and, while politics have also made their way online, this encountering presents unique challenges negotiated in light of one’s online social network.

While Facebook serves primarily to connect people socially, it also functions as a “tool of political discussion” (Kushin and Kitchener 2009). Though not its original intent, Facebook has become a site of political participation. During the 2016 presidential election, 35% of 18-29 year olds considered ‘social media’ the most helpful source for learning new election oriented information, which was about twice

as much as ‘news websites/applications’, another online source, which only 18% of 18-29 year olds used (Gottfried et al. 2016). Though about half (51%) of all SNS users learned about the election from SNSs, only 18% shared election-related information, either by posting about it or commenting on a post, which amounts to 15% of adults overall (Gottfried et al. 2016). Though people commonly learn election related information on more than one SNS, Facebook is the site where that engagement is most likely to occur (Gottfried et al. 2016). These statistics show that users engage with political matters and social media, both separately and simultaneously. However, online political participation is often met with criticism, as the following section describes.

“Clicktivism” As Low-Cost Political Participation

In response to the heightened presence that Internet based communication technologies have taken in our lives, a modern form of political participation has emerged in online spaces, often termed “clicktivism” (Halupka 2014:115). The legitimacy of clicktivism as a method of political participation is consistently suspect by scholars. However, few studies of clicktivism provide a concrete definition. Rotman et al. (2011:821) offer a succinct conceptualization, defining clicktivism as “low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity.”

Researchers adopt and measure this term in various ways, which depend on the site of engagement they are studying. Stuart Shulman’s (2009) study of a large-scale, public comment email campaign response to the EPA’s 2004 mercury rulemaking

offers a critique of the motivations that inspire online political action. Interest groups disseminate requests for political action via email, which does spur individuals to online action, however the emails that resulted were ineffective. Instead of demonstrating an impassioned citizenry, the emails were “non-substantive, non-deliberative, and unoriginal” that left the EPA staff to question if people truly cared (2009:46). Shulman concludes that there are “perverse incentives” to online political participation; people exercise their rights through political action online, but by doing so diminish the legitimacy of their action (2009:25). If high volume is not also high quality, the participatory method is weakened.

In contrast to Shulman, David Karpf (2010) approaches clicktivism as a method of legitimate political participation. Karpf tracked the email campaign tactics used by advocacy groups and compiled a set of ‘action requests’ ranging from ‘donate money’ to ‘email state legislature’ (2010:27). He concludes that mass emails function equivalently to the petitions of offline activism, representing a “difference in degree rather than a difference in kind,” and that low-quality, high-volume actions are only one tactic employed by advocacy groups (2010:35). Karpf makes these claims as a specific contestation of Shulman’s critique of clicktivism. However, while this study brings to light the various methods of online political participation, it did not weigh the actual efficacy of those participatory methods as Shulman’s study did. This leaves us to wonder about the validity or usefulness of those online actions.

Motivations Behind Political Participation

Motivation reflects the “interplay between personal attitudes toward a specific action”

(Lilleker et al. 2017:22) and an external manifestation of that attitude. Offline actions, such as voting, contacting election officials, or taking part in demonstrations, are generally intended to influence decision makers (Lilleker 2017). However, studies have found that while often acting on behalf of others, political activists' altruistic motivations can be rooted in selfish motivations (Teske 1997) such as seeking enjoyment, self-realization, and personal well-being (Klar and Kasser 2009). In distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations Lilleker et al. refer to previous studies to explain, "the greater the reward, perceived or actual, predicted higher likelihood of action, including gaining encouragement, positive feedback, and approval from peers" (2017:23). Extrinsic, community oriented (Omoto 2010), pro-social (Grant 2008) motivations are an important component to political participation. Concerning the use of digital technologies, recent scholarship has shown people turn to this site of engagement to "express a view, supportive or otherwise," as a method of political action (Lilleker 2017:21).

However, with digital technology expanding the political sphere and modifying the architecture of self-representation, new and under-studied motivations for political action and exhibiting political participation emerge. The following section addresses this gap in the scholarship by bringing the previous two chapters into a discussion of online political participation as it becomes a technique of self-representation on SNSs. Lowered barriers to political participation alter the motivations that individuals possess for taking action. I also suggest that there is an element of social value that accompanies political participation, which is of particular salience when an individual decides how to signal their identity to their friends.

POSTING AS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

It is well established in literature from the fields of sociology, political science, computer mediated communication studies, and political communication that digital technologies “provide a range of new means for engaging in civically oriented forms of behavior” (Lilleker et al. 2017:22). People can sign online petitions, email their representative, or share an article to Facebook and feel that they are fulfilling a citizen’s duty to be informed and take action. However, I argue that when these expressive actions occur in a social space, such as Facebook, there is a component of intentional identity construction taking place through political participation. As noted in chapter one, identity is performative and situated within the social context in such a way that reflects the norms and values back to the group. At a time when politics seem ever-present, appearing politically knowledgeable on current political and social justice matters has social value. Expressive methods of political participation become tied up with methods of self-representation on Facebook, where we are able to selectively curate our self-image. In “Postful Protest,” *Portlandia*, a satirical television show rife with social commentary, offers a sharp critique of the online political participant:

Carrie: Fred, there’s a peaceful protest tonight for that bicyclist that was hit on Williams.

Fred: Ohhh.

Carrie: 7pm, please wear black.

Fred: I’ll post something about it.

Carrie: Uh, maybe we should go? I mean, I feel like I’m always posting political things, but I’m not actually participating.

Fred: I know, I guess I do kind of hashtag things without really thinking about it. RIP this, RIP that, pray for... whoever.

Carrie: Okay, well we should post about going to something.

Fred: And actually go.

Carrie: Okay, but let’s still post about it.

Fred: Yes.

Carrie: I want people to know we’re going.

Fred: Definitely.
Carrie: But it's not about us.
Fred: No.
Carrie: Cool!

Carrie and Fred are Portland hipsters that post to SNSs about noble causes, but rarely attend events or engage in instrumental offline action. In this scene, they decide to actually attend a protest, but by the time Carrie and Fred decide their attire, track down bicycles, and eat lunch, they're late for the main event. They run into a camera crew and news anchor, also running late, and Carrie self-advertises her 'Carrie is woke'^v twitter account.

This sharp commentary reveals that there is a form of social value to political action, a component of online political participation that few studies have touched on. Posting about political issues is often motivated by a desire to spread political knowledge, but it is also motivated by a desire to *appear* politically knowledgeable, or "woke" as Carrie referred to herself. Facebook provides a suitable platform for a user to curate a self-representation premised on politically oriented information and discourses. To those that do, they utilize expressive online political participation to convey to others their level of political awareness. What prompts this? I argue that self-image becomes a motivating factor behind online political participation on Facebook. As continues, I explain my methodology for examining this further.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

As a student at a small liberal arts college, I find that discussions on political matters exist rampantly both inside and outside of the classroom. With the presence that they hold in our lives, social networking sites (SNSs) become another site of political engagement where college students are able to encounter and engage with political discourses, as well as utilize political discourses as a method of representing themselves to their peers on SNSs. The research design I have chosen captures both quantitative and qualitative data concerning college students development of a self-representation, or lack thereof, on Facebook as well as measures of online and offline political participation.

Survey data provided empirical data on behavior and attempted to illustrate the dissonance between offline political awareness and an active construction of self as it occurs through one's use of, or visible engagement with, politically oriented discourses on Facebook. However, there is significant nuance and variation to motivations behind identity construction, and interviews provided rich accounts of behavior beyond the scope of the survey.

I obtained quantitative data through an online survey (provided in Appendix A) dispersed to current students at Whitman College. The survey was sent out with a brief explanation to the general student listserv and, fittingly, on Facebook. For the latter, the survey link was posted to the four 'Whitman College Class of 20__' groups for each year of current students. Since I am studying the various behaviors and motivations of

offline and online political participation, the only requirement for survey participation was that an individual have a Facebook account and logged on at least once in the last year. The survey was open for two weeks, with a reminder to both sites of dissemination stating that a week remained to complete the survey. After twelve days of the survey being shared on these two platforms, responses were dramatically skewed by gender with male respondents comprising only 9.4% (9/85) of total respondents. To compensate for this significant difference, I also shared the survey with two Whitman College fraternities in an attempt to elicit more male responses.

Sample and Participant Demographics

There were a total of 125 responses at the end of survey data collection.

Demographically, the gender and race volunteered by respondents was not reflective of the general student population. Of the survey respondents, 69% (82) were female, 30% (36) were male, and 1% (1) identified as ‘a different category not mentioned here’.

This reflects the pattern of gender imbalance at Whitman (58% female; 42% male) but to a greater degree. In all, 89% identified as White; 2.5% as Black or African-American; 6.7% as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; 1.6% as American Indian or Alaska Native; 10% as Asian; 2.5% as ‘a different category not mentioned here’; no survey respondents noted a Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander identity. The sample resembled the general student population, but highlighted the already present lacking racial diversity.

In terms of gender, the interview participants reflected that of the survey participants. Ten out of the fourteen participants are female and four are male. There

were participants from all years in college: three freshmen, two sophomores, three juniors, and six seniors.

Measures

Questions in the survey and interview were intended to provide an illustration of an individual's understanding of their constructed representation of self on Facebook and their use of Facebook as a site of political participation. Both research instruments include questions about politically geared behaviors such as, but not limited to, posting about current political matters, sharing news articles about elected officials or policy changes, information about social justice movements, or personal insights/feelings concerning political happenings.

The survey began with questions of general Facebook behavior (i.e. how often an individual checks and posts) and continued to ask about the usual substance of their posts. If a person selected that they post about politically oriented information/news, they would be directed to another question asking them to explain their motivations behind this behavior. At the end of the survey, respondents were informed that this study would also be conducting interviews to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of identity construction on Facebook and attitudes towards politically oriented activity on Facebook. Respondents were then offered the opportunity to leave their name and email if they were interested in participating further as an interviewee. I then sent an email request to those survey participations and obtained my interview participants from those who responded with interest.

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 25 and 55 minutes. The range of interview questions (provided in Appendix B) were structured to reflect the natural flow of a conversation and capture a variety of behaviors, beginning with broad questions about general Facebook use and narrowed into questions concerning an individual's motivation behind their methods of identity construction on Facebook (such as sharing articles, posting their personal thoughts, etc.). I also asked questions about their offline political participation and their use of Facebook as a site political participation. The questions served as a guide for the direction that I wanted to take the interview, but I frequently asked follow-up questions to clarify specific behavioral motivations. For example, clarifying questions include, but are not limited to, 'Why is that?', 'What causes your aversion?', and 'Is that because you feel uncomfortable posting on Facebook?'. The last question can be considered a leading question, however, I generally referenced an emotion (discomfort, fear of judgment, etc.) if an interviewee had already used that term in their self-description. The interviews were conducted in private spaces, either Whitman's Sociology Workroom or an empty classroom, and were documented with an audio recorder.

Operationalizing Political Participation

As discussed in my literature review, there is a hierarchy of political participation that distinguishes types of action by the level of demonstrated engagement and commitment. It is here that I modify Lester Milbrath's (1965) model to depict the gradation of offline political activities that this particular population of college students engages with. 'Spectator activities' are those that require a low level of time and

energy and, for this study, were operationalized as ‘reading/consuming political news’ and ‘discussing political matters with friends and/or family.’ ‘Transitional activities’ are those that show higher commitment to a cause but lack instrumental action, operationalized as ‘taking classes on political matters,’ ‘advocacy or volunteer work,’ and ‘attending a march or protest.’ ‘Gladiatorial activities,’ those that indicate a person is drawn into the political fray, were operationalized as ‘maintaining a leadership role in student government or organization’ or ‘holding a paid position in an advocacy role.’

Online political participation has numerous definitions, seen in the various context dependent actions that are encompassed in the research of clicktivism previously discussed. In this study, I operationalize online political participation as an individual’s posting and sharing of political and social justice oriented articles, short videos, photos, or general information to their Facebook profile. For example, a political post may be considered an article with a state-by-state map of hate group prevalence, a short video of a celebrity discussing diversity as a facet of patriotism, or a photo taken at the Women’s March. In this study, I did not consider liking or commenting on a political or social justice post to be a method of online political participation because it does not appear on an individual’s Facebook profile, the specific online space that an individual has to represent their identity through online material. Though liking and commenting are public acts and valid methods of political participation, they are not self-representative actions to the same degree as posting or sharing online material to one’s profile. A liked article would represent the person for only as long as it appeared in someone else’s newsfeed or a friends’ timeline, whereas

an article shared to their own timeline is visible long after the action has occurred (unless they delete the post, that is).

I largely left it up to the interviewee to determine what qualified as ‘political’ and ‘social justice’, but provided a definition and examples when requested. By leaving this open-ended and not establishing a limited understanding of political action, I was able to gain a full understanding of the myriad ways people understand themselves as political actors through their politically motivated behavior. When asked, I stated that ‘political’ could be understood by a topic’s relation to government functioning, officials, or policy, a ‘political action’ could be attendance at the Women’s March, and ‘social justice’ could refer to a topic related to reproductive freedom or the Black Lives Matter movement.

Analytical Technique

Coding

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings and printed the resulting documents. At this stage, I used an inductive approach to develop generalizations about group behaviors from observations (Babbie 1998). To begin this process, I read the transcriptions multiple times, highlighted quotes, and made note of specific motivations and behaviors as they appeared. I was able to identify trends within the qualitative data and withdraw themes concerning motivations toward and against online political participation. I then developed a codebook out of this data analysis (see in Appendix C). With this inductive method and the data that resulted, I was able to uncover patterns of behavior and motivation.

Limitations

My methodology is not without limitations. A natural limitation of using surveys and voluntary interviews to obtain data is that people self-selectively participate, meaning the resulting data may only be representative of those that feel strongly about this topic. This research was executed with participants from a small liberal arts college, which is not reflective of the general population by sex, race, or income. This being a college campus, there is often critical thinking about pressing political and social issues, encountered in public classroom settings and privately with friends. This can influence the political climate we encounter offline and on Facebook, both of which shape our understanding of what it means to be a political participant.

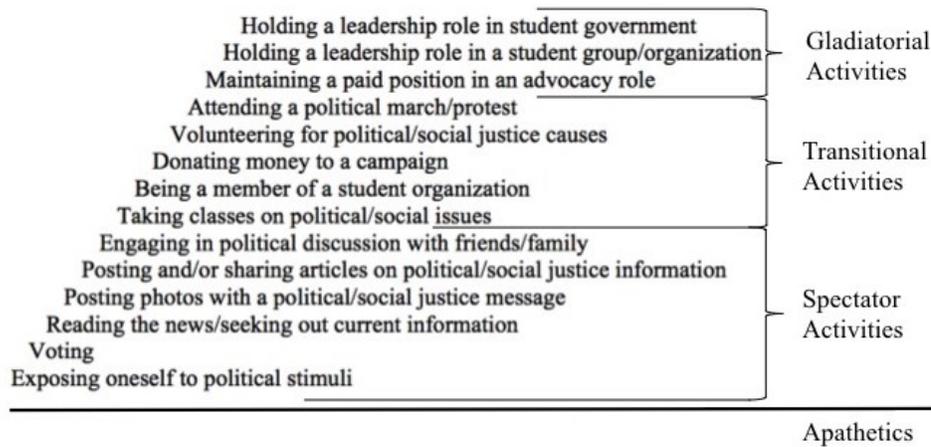
Disseminating the survey to two fraternities does bring to mind a question of selective sampling. Within the general Whitman population, 42% of the student body is involved in the Greek system, indicating that it is not an exceptional activity but a common facet of campus life for many students (Whitman College 2017). It being a widespread activity, it does not carry significant exclusivity. Over-sampling the male population, by emailing fraternities, provided benefit that outweighed any potential costs.

FINDINGS

Though the survey data provided a breadth of data, it did not facilitate the depth of insight that I had anticipated. Interviews proved much more useful at providing rich, nuanced data about the motivations that individuals have towards political participation on Facebook and I largely rely upon them to guide my results. Therefore, I have structured this section by the findings from the qualitative data and, at times, supplement with quantitative data from the surveys.

A hierarchy of political involvement emerged from the interviews, I therefore employ Lester Milbrath's (1965) hierarchy, discussed in the literature review, as a model upon which to present my own findings. Figure 2 depicts the various activities that interviewees use as locations of political participation. I have retained Milbrath's approach and titles, but have sorted this population's activities as they reflect the sub-dimensions of political involvement similarly to Milbrath's original model. I suggested some of the activities in the interview (reading the news, engaging in discussion with friends/family, taking courses that foster discussion on political matters, advocacy or volunteer work) and interviewees supplemented with activities they consider methods of political action or social justice work. Though I did not ask about attendance in the Women's March that occurred on January 21st, 2017, interviewees brought it up as an example of political activity in every interview. Other methods of political participation were brought up by the interviewees, such as voting and donating to a non-profit organization, and have been included in an adapted version of Milbrath's (1965) model of political involvement below.

Figure 2. Adapted hierarchy of political involvement



All fourteen interviewees partake in at least a low level of political participation, which was substantiated by their method of involvement, such as ‘reading the news’ and ‘discussing political matters with family/friends.’ Every interviewee engaged in these activities to some degree. However, when asked about ‘transitional activities’ and ‘gladiatorial activities’ specific to this population, such as ‘advocacy or volunteer work,’ responses began to vary. The more commitment and responsibility that activities required, the less likely interviewees were to partake. As Milbrath termed it, the levels of activity reflect a “hierarchy of costs” (1965:19), as moving up the hierarchy activities demand a higher level of time and energy. Interviewee behaviors clustered into four groups, each characterized by differing levels of offline and online activity. These groups emerged from the inductive approach to data analysis and are displayed in Table 1. A major source of differentiation relevant to this study lies in their online political activity.

Table 1. Behavior Characteristics of Groups

	Spectator Activities			Transitional Activities			Gladiatorial Activities	
	Reads/co nsumes political news	Talks with friends/ family	Active online: posts opinions, photos, and/or shares articles on political and/or social justice oriented issues/discourses	Takes classes that engage with political issues	Attends marches and/or protests	Volunteers in advocacy work of some capacity	Holds a position in student government or organization	Has paid work in a field related to social justice, advocacy work
Group 1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Group 2	X	X	X	X	x			
Group 3	X	X		X	X	x	X	X
Group 4	X	X		x	x			

While behaviors clustered into specific groups, there was variation within each group.

A bolded, uppercase ‘X’ indicates that a majority of group members partake in the activity and an un-bolded, lowercase ‘x’ indicates that a minority of group members partake in the activity. If left blank, there are not any group members that partake in the activity. Table 2 depicts the number of interviewees that comprise each group within the total sample population.

Table 2. Online and offline activity by number of interviewees

		Active Offline	
		Yes	No
Active Online	Yes	1 (G1)	5 (G2)
	No	3 (G3)	5 (G4)

In the above table, ‘active offline’ indicates that an interviewee participates politically through actions that require a greater level of time, energy, and commitment than spectator activities. Both Group 1 and Group 3 are considered ‘active offline’ due to their participation in gladiatorial activities. If an interviewee is ‘active online’ it indicates that they politically participate through Facebook photos, posts, or shared videos or articles about politically oriented information. Concerning only offline

activities, ten out of fourteen interviewees had minimal political participation. Of those minimally involved, five interviewees acted as a political participant on Facebook. Of the four interviewees that were highly involved, only one represented themselves as a political participant on Facebook.

The narratives that individuals construct about their online behavior reflect their beliefs about not only the purpose and utility of SNSs, but also which forms of political participation they consider valid methods of political action. This influences which people post about political matters, which in turn affects the orientations individuals carry toward the political action that appears in online social spaces. As follows, I describe the behaviors and motivations that define each group. I begin with Group 3, and the strong critiques and insights the interviews offered, to set the stage for the remaining groups. I continue with Group 2, the Passive Posters, and consider their motivations for online political participation. I then move to Group 1, the Activist, before ending with Group 4, interviewees that were inactive offline and online.

Keeping the Political Offline

One Group 3 (G3) interviewee exhibited a high level of offline political activity, seen through their paid work within the Walla Walla community/city government, their role in student government, and involvement with other organizations on campus. As is common with the hierarchy of political participation, they also partook in low-cost forms of political participation, such as reading the news, discussing political matters with friends/family, and taking classes where they engage with social and political issues. This interviewee exhibited a mobilizing attitude towards political/social justice

issues and is made particularly uncomfortable to see political/social justice oriented Facebook posts by individuals who do not engage in the offline work. In their words,

I get pissed off because I see a lot of people on Facebook that will post a lot of stuff and rant and rant and rant and at the end of the day they're just sitting in the library, posting on Facebook. And to me it means so much more if you're getting out there and advocating for things and actually making a difference in the community you live in or interacting face-to-face and actually have that heartfelt conversation or social interaction that actually instigates change whereas posts on Facebook, at the end of the day, I feel like actually don't make that much of a difference.

This interviewee's aversion to posting online is rooted in disapproval of the group of Facebook posters that do not put "meaning to their words." They are concerned that by posting on a political matter they would align themselves with a group characterized by their low level of offline activity. While this interviewee is action oriented when it comes to political and social justice matters, they are disconcerted to see friends only act *online*. They do not consider Facebook a suitable venue at fostering political and social change. While a post may bring attention to an issue, it is a "dud" at continuing the conversation.

Another G3 interviewee leads a student organization and considers it their responsibility to empower others and provide the tools for them to be independently successful. For example, they brought a speaker to the organization to discuss access to birth control in an effort to educate members about their resources. This advocacy work is not reflected on their Facebook profile. While they care about educating others and fostering conversations about local and national politics within their organization, this committed interest does not appear online. Conservative family members prove to have an impact upon this individual's self-representation on Facebook.

I don't want to polarize the people I'm friends with on Facebook. I have a very conservative family and very liberal friends so, as much as my values align with my friends a lot more than my family's, it's not exactly something that I want to get into over Facebook, just because it's a really stressful conversation. Politics in general are not something that I like discussing with family and if I discuss them on Facebook it's essentially discussing them with family.

Another G3 interviewee holds a leadership position in student government and considers their daily consumption practices (e.g. clothing worn, dietary decisions) as a site of their committed political participation. This interviewee was outspoken and committed to the causes they cared for.

My Facebook feed remains relatively apolitical, which I think is pretty notable because I really do understand myself as deeply motivated by social justice and deeply committed to student advocacy and deeply committed to other kinds of activist causes and that's something that's really not present in my Facebook profile.

Unlike twelve out of fourteen interviewees, this person does not experience a fear of judgment when deciding how to represent themselves on Facebook. However, this interviewee notes that the "lack of nuance available on Facebook" is a source of discomfort. They are not uncomfortable with sharing their opinion, but uncomfortable with the way their opinion may be perceived on that platform. This interviewee is also concerned that by posting something in an attempt to foster conversation or spread awareness, they risk misrepresenting a cause that they seek to advance.

Though the politically oriented and social justice work was of significant importance to these three individuals, they refrain from developing this side of their identity on Facebook. Whether they question the ability of Facebook posts to *actually* foster change, were deterred by the lack of nuance, or did not want to polarize familial relations, their general interest, commitment, and involvement in advocacy work, city

government, and student government reflect deep interest and concern, but did not appear in posts or shared articles.

Passive Posters

Group 2 (G2) was comprised of individuals that consume politically oriented information through the news, engage in discussion with friends and/or family, and take classes that foster discussion around political or social issues (as three out of five G2 members did). However, this group is markedly different than the group previously discussed in two ways: they do not engage in any political or social justice oriented advocacy work, paid or volunteer, offline and they post about political and/or social justice issues on Facebook. This dissonance is in the exact opposite direction of G3, a group characterized by its high level of offline activity and negligible level of online activity.

Unlike the first G3 interviewee mentioned, this group sees online political participation as a valid method of “contributing to the conversation.” Within G2, the interviewees exhibited similar posting behavior with little variance in motivation. All of the interviewees in this group post about political and/or social justice issues because they want to share information (e.g. an article about the echo chamber that we encounter on SNSs) or spread awareness about a specific issue (e.g. a short video clip on Black Lives Matter). When asked why they feel compelled to share their political beliefs with their friends through Facebook posts, an interviewee responded,

I don't know, I get so riled up sometimes and I go to my computer and am just like 'I have to share this with someone,' and maybe that's a way for me to share it and engage with political discourse, but maybe it's really just like, getting it off my back and unloading it to someone else.

While some temper their opinion in their posts, three out of five Passive Posters use posts specifically for sharing their opinion with others. The remaining two use politically oriented posts as a method of passively informing others or, as one interviewee phrased it, to “point something out without stating an opinion.” Only one interviewee routinely wrote their own text to accompany a shared article or video. Other interviewees felt that the article or video “speaks for itself” or were concerned that their written text could detract from its message.

Online posts also allow for individuals to show their involvement and support behind an issue, allowing them to act as political participants online. While displaying a shared article about the Women’s March an interviewee said, “I didn’t participate in the march, but I wanted people to know that I’m still a part of it and I still agree with the movement.” This highlights that a disparity can exist between online and offline participation as Facebook posts allow for an individual to compensate for their lack of offline activity. The individuals in this group are motivated to post by their desire to politically participate and their desire to be *seen* as a political participant.

An Activist Offline and Online

The single individual in G1 was the only interviewee to self-describe as an “activist.” They felt a strong commitment to their offline work, holding multiple leadership positions in various student organizations while also volunteering their time and holding a paid position in student government. They considered Facebook to be a social space but also a space for political participation. As a member of numerous movements and initiatives they consider it important to use Facebook “in a productive

manner because it's a good platform," however the interviewee noted, "I try not to be too politically skewed in my opinion and I try to keep it neutral because I'm representing [various organizations]." Membership in various groups imposes external constraints, which forces them to temper their opinion and neutralize the content that they post, but does not dissuade them from posting. When discussing their congruent representation on Facebook as their offline presentation they noted,

I am so highly involved and I make sure that I am physically in spaces where I can have these kinds of conversations and be very active. I would definitely call myself an activist because I do physically place myself in spaces where I can do that.

They are active on Facebook while also finding spaces and groups where they are able to be active offline. By this definition, there is a corporeal component to activism that could delegitimize political action that exists solely online. The meaning of a political action is contingent upon the space in which it occurs, and online political action may be suspect if not occurring in supplement to offline political action.

This interviewee demonstrates a high level of awareness when deciding which online materials to post, seen in their thought process behind posting on a political or social justice matter. They initially consider if their post, a shared article for instance, contains information that the community discussed in the article would like shared. Next, they consider if it is "[their] community" to share information about, because they don't want to "take up space in someone else's movement." This level of self-awareness and reflexivity that occurs prior to posting further sets this individual apart from the Passive Posters, who were more likely to consider source validity or their self-image before posting.

Intentional Resistance

The individuals in G4 did not show a high level of offline activity and refrained from any online political participation. The people in this group were likely to read current news and engage in offline discussion about political or social justice matters, but recognize that they do not engage with political or social issues on a higher level of activity. Each interviewee noted specific reasons for not posting to Facebook. One explanation was that it is “just talking,”

If I'm upset about something, what can I do about it? And like, broadcasting my opinions on Facebook is not going to accomplish anything... It doesn't accomplish anything. Calling senators accomplishes something. Donating to organizations accomplishes something. I get really fed up with just talking about things, and I think that's part of it.

Another aversion comes from not wanting to appear like a ‘passive poster’ as one interviewee stated, “sharing seems passive, like I’m just on the bandwagon.”

Explanations of their online behavior often reflect a critique of G2 posters, as three of the five G4 interviewees did not want to align themselves with individuals that bring political matters into a social space. Four out of five of the people in this group have a negative connotation of Facebook users that post about political matters. One interviewee noted, “It just seems like someone is trying to prove to people that they read the article or prove that they're smart.” Twelve out of fourteen interviewees noted a concern about being judged by their posts to social media. One interviewee noted that a fear of judgment could be a factor in their aversion to online political participation.

There's this notion that the loudest voices are the most intelligent and I see that on Facebook and I just look at it and find it kind of annoying and don't want to be that. I judge them and I don't want to be judged.

Passive Posters were suspect by this group of resisters. The critiques presented by this group show that there is an attribute to online political participation that signals something about the person who posts. As the last two quotes indicate, it may show that a person is choosing online methods of political participation to curate a self-representation that highlights intellect, awareness, or insight.

Self-Representation on Facebook

None of the interview participants turn to Facebook to develop a completely alternative version of their self. Since online connections are rooted in offline social networks, there is little room for complete misrepresentation. During the interviews, a universal refrain was a version of “it’s accurate, but insufficient.” While friend groups are made visible in tagged photos and interests appear through liked pages, interviewees felt that their Facebook friends do not gain adequate insight into the sentiment that a person holds towards their friends or interests. Interviewees noted it’s “only the good stuff” that finds its way onto Facebook; profiles are comprised of the best photos, the funniest captions, clever comments, and poignant articles. People put their best front forward and exercise impression management to do so. When asked if they felt their Facebook representation was accurate, one interviewee noted, “It depends on if you actually want to know me or not. Like, you would know that I play Frisbee and raft and am close with my family, but you wouldn’t know about me, you wouldn’t know where my values are.”

The self we perform on Facebook is managed with the full awareness that just as we judge others, others judge us. One interviewee uses Facebook to gain an initial

sense of someone, what they call “the groundwork,” but they are aware of possible misrepresentation and noted, “I use it as a first impression, and then I make sure to continually analyze that impression so I don’t put them in a box.” This person, a member of G4, abstained from Facebook as a site of identity construction specifically because they were aware of possible misperception on behalf of others. Our self-representation on Facebook is another front. We are able to curate the version of our self that we convey to others and, “construct our self-image,” as one interviewee termed it.

Concerning the type of online materials used as methods of self-representation, the quantitative data has proved to be insightful. Of the sixty survey participants that do partake in online political participation, 82% of participants post about social justice oriented information/news; 72% post on information/news on government officials, the electoral college, and/or candidates; 69% post about information/news on policy/policy changes; while 43% post on personal thoughts/feelings on political or social justice information/news. This last finding was echoed in the interview data as only one out of six online political participants write their personal perspective on a political or social justice post. Concerning motivation behind political action, 55%^{vi} agreed that they partake in online political participation because they “want to be seen as a politically engaged person” by others. Though this is hardly a majority of the sample, this does indicate that curating a specific type of self-image on Facebook is a motivating factor behind online political participation.

The Fronts We Display and The Dissonance We Create

A dissonance in fronts can occur when the behaviors exhibited online, which generate one's self-representation, do not align with one's offline action or performance. Eight of the fourteen interviewees, those in groups 2 and 3, had dissonance in their political participation offline and their political participation online. In this section I seek to discuss two findings that arose from the interviews: Facebook as social, not political, and more explicitly note the motivations behind political participation, or lack of, on Facebook. These are intertwined and, at times, difficult to separate. Though I previously discussed both of these groups, I will now more explicitly position them side-by-side to distinguish crucial differences.

The interviewees in G3 all consider Facebook a social space and not a forum to engage with political matters. This group has a high level of offline activity, which may affect their inclination to differentiate their deeply held and often personal political concerns from a social, but sometimes political, space. Is this dissonance between online and offline an issue for G3 members? Not necessarily. One participant stated that even if their family's political values aligned with their own they wouldn't necessarily want to post about political or social issues to Facebook, "it's never been that kind of space for me," they noted. Another interviewee stated that when considering which online materials to post, political and social justice oriented posts do not generate the amount of likes they prefer to see, a measure that served as a strong form of validation. This individual sacrificed deeply held beliefs about their agency as a political agent, because it did not adequately perform in this social space. Two of the three G3 interviewees felt that political matters and discourses are too nuanced and

intricate for Facebook and that its structure of engagement and communication does not adequately foster meaningful or enlightening conversation. Passive Posters did not share this view. All five G2 interviewees were motivated by a desire to “raise awareness” and “spread knowledge” about current social and political issues and were concerned that other people were not independently seeking out current political information or news. This being an election year, every member of this group increased the frequency of political posts to Facebook in an attempt to educate their friends at a divisive time.

Two Passive Posters exhibited a degree of reflexivity when considering the contribution their posts would make to the social structure of Facebook. One interviewee noted that they wanted to share quite a few articles to Facebook when the Trump administration entered the White House, but they, “[took] a step back” out of concern that “people would think it would be too much,” because at that point, “everyone was kind of frazzled and done.” This interviewee partook in impression management in modifying their behavior because of how the audience may receive their performance, which also indicates their intentionality behind the material they do post. In another act of impression management, a different Passive Poster stated that they significantly temper their tone on Facebook. They self-identify as a “radical feminist” but curate a moderated self-representation on Facebook, as they feel their opinions would not be agreeable to others. This could compel them to discredit Facebook as a political space; if it is not accommodating to your genuine opinions and concerns, why partake? They reconcile this by diluting the content of the posts they do make and are able to represent themselves as a political participant, but only to a

degree. Like the previous Passive Poster, they also partake in impression management in their consideration of the front they reveal before performing. Despite these two instances, none of the five Passive Posters were self-reflexive regarding the disparity that existed between their online political activity and offline political inactivity. However, every member of this group believed that their posting on political and social justice matters represented them as a politically aware person.

A valid counterargument to terming this ‘dissonance’ is that online political participation is a low-cost spectator activity that is not necessarily indicative of higher levels of offline political participation. This would therefore not create dissonance because they are not inaccurately representing themselves as a person who partakes in higher levels of offline political action, specifically more transitional and gladiatorial activities. However, I argue that exercising the ability to shape the social space we encounter on Facebook into a political space is problematic when the online political participant does not partake in higher levels of political participation. The problem is not that they are subverting unspoken rules of eligibility for posting on social and political matters. Rather, my point is that an individual who pursues high level methods of political action autonomously seek an instrumental approach to generating change which may allow them to bring a greater depth of insight to the proverbial table provided by online social spaces.

The crux of this thesis lies in an explanation of how and why these dissonances develop. The necessary question arises: Why is political participation something to signal and why on Facebook? In the following section, I employ symbolic interactionism and dramaturgical theory to answer this question.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

While informally discussing posting behavior with a friend, they explained their use of Facebook as a site to curate a self-representation in supplement to their offline performance. They feel judged by inaccurate measures offline, like their vehicle, which they do not consider representative of the type of person they want to be. They turn to Facebook to erect this perceived misjudgment. The resulting political posts represent their effort to appear as an individual that cares about issues beyond themselves. On Facebook, this person is able to paint a picture of who they imagine themselves to be.

In this section, I seek to explain the motivation behind the development of political self-representations on Facebook as it emerged from my research. I employ symbolic interactionism to offer an explanation of political participation as symbolically meaningful within our culture. This interpretation is found in both American society at large and my interviews: being informed about current political and social issues signifies fulfillment of civic duty. This symbolic meaning leads individuals to enact specific online material when developing their ‘Facebook self.’

Political Participation as Symbolic Action

Under symbolic interactionism, a symbol is defined as “social objects used by the actor for representation and communication” (Charon 1985:40). Words, objects, and acts can all be symbols that stand for something else and are employed “for the purpose of giving off meaning that he or she believes will make sense to the other” (Charon 1985:41). Symbols have a social component, as their meanings and values are defined

through social interaction. The resulting socialization through symbols makes possible an “understanding of each other’s social acts” and a “cumulative knowledge and culture” (Charon 1985:63). The resulting culture then reinforces the meaning behind symbols.

If we consider the activities characterizing political participation (seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2) as meaningful symbols, we can understand the social utility motivating their employment in self-representation on Facebook. The act of political participation signifies fulfillment of civic duty. As interviewees noted, they feel a “responsibility” and a “duty to step up and be politically informed.”

Representing the Political Self

On Facebook, the profile is the user’s space to display their chosen ‘front.’ As Goffman (1959) noted, we employ a front in a way that is unique to the situation and audience. Though dramaturgical theory was developed before the advent of SNSs, the structure of Facebook accommodates theoretical application. The profile exists as the specific space to display one’s front and convey meaningful information through online materials to their audience. Facebook acts as an alternative site of identity construction, where we gain “control” (boyd 2010:222) in our employment of representative materials and impression management.

Determining how to represent one’s self through online materials is a complex act as an individual uses their community’s cultural values as a toolbox through which to develop their self-representation. When crafting one’s profile, they consider which online materials and information will convey the desired characteristics to their

audience, and utilize impression management accordingly. As Goffman writes, “when one’s activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed” (1959:111). On our front, we employ specific symbolic activities to convey meaningful characteristics about ourselves while downplaying the less desired characteristics. When addressing *idealization*, Goffman writes,

“Thus, when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behaviors as a whole. To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs, we may look upon it...as a ceremony – as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community” (1959:35).

The “officially accredited values of the society” guide action and can act as motivation to partake in political action online and offline. Facebook provides the stage and online political materials become the expressive equipment by which the actor conveys to the audience their desired representation. People then employ political participation for its symbolic utility. When this becomes part of an individual’s self-representation, it communicates benevolent care, broad political and social awareness, and, most of all, conformance to cultural values. Passive Posters employ political participation as a tool in developing their self-representation on Facebook because of the characteristics that it conveys to their audience.

The Evaluation of Political Participation Online vs. Offline

A critical difference in the method of online political participation is its expressive component. Returning to Milbrath’s (1965) terminology for the sub-dimensions of

political participation, Passive Posters use an overt, expressive action to signal political participation. A post is an episodic, social engagement with political or social justice matters that indicates an approaching valence to an issue, but fails to convey instrumental action to achieving political or social change. Meanwhile, those that maintain a high level of activity offline, and do not participate online, partake in a form of autonomous, continuous, and instrumental action. This group spends more time and energy on matters that are of greater political or social significance, which is reflected in their commitment to advocacy work.

Though political participation is generally considered fulfillment of civic duty, the symbolic meaning of this action is transformed on SNSs. Of the fourteen interviewees, eight of them did not represent themselves as political participants on Facebook. Six of the eight chose not to post about political or social justice matters because they did not consider Facebook to be an appropriate or adequate venue to foster meaningful conversations about social and political issues. The Passive Posters seek to convey themselves as political participants and see their strategy of online political participation as legitimate political action and an effective method of “raising awareness” and “spreading knowledge.” However, this effort fails when others do not consider political participation, as it is confined to Facebook, as a legitimate political action. In this instance, posts about political or social justice issues can instigate an opposite and unintended reaction: instead of engaging, the audience member may reject the information when forwarded by someone that does not engage in higher levels of political action offline. On Facebook, politically oriented posts

can be met with skepticism when someone's self-representation is in dissonance to their offline performance. Nonetheless, people develop a "false front" (Goffman 1959:59) because they want to utilize the symbolic meaning of political participation and convey to others that they are politically active and aware.

The "low-cost" (Rotman et al. 2011:821) nature of online political participation makes it an enticing option for people that want to be seen as politically active by their peers. This invites people that engage in lower levels of political activity and, as was noted in the findings section, acts as an aversion for others because they do not want to conflate themselves with a group characterized by their passivity. Consequently, the political and social justice oriented discourses that we encounter on Facebook are not reflective of the concerns and caliber of insight that the other groups may offer.

CONCLUSION

“The adequacy of functioning of a political system may well be decisive for the happiness and well-being of the members of that society. Since the manner in which citizens participate in their political process is integral to the manner in which the system functions, the question of how and why persons become involved in politics is germane to the concerns of every man, as well as to the curious probing of social scientists” (Milbrath 1965:2).

This research sought to study the orientations that Facebook users carry toward online political participation and the motivations that embolden its employment or discourage its use. Through an exploratory and inductive approach, I found that individuals utilize the measures of impression management gained on Facebook to construct self-representations that differ from their offline performance. We present a front that is an idealized version of our self. This dissonance between online and offline reveals that the employment of political and social justice discourses in one’s online representation can be used to signal oneself as a political participant to their online community. This also confirms the importance that it carries in our culture: political participation is valuable and reflects positively upon the individual taking the action. Though the low-cost nature (Rotman et al. 2011) of online political participation accommodates its widespread use, there are many other significant differences between it and offline political participation. Returning to Lester Milbrath’s (1965) subdimensions of political action, political participation offline is much more likely to be instrumental in causing change while expressive action reflects a reduced motivational drive to cause change. Nonetheless, in an online space, this expressive political action symbolizes political participation.

The political behavior of individuals has consequences for the greater political system that leads and represents our country. Intrinsically connected, micro-level decisions manifest in macro-level consequences, both the successes and the failures. I continue with a few notes that are related to the lack of instrumental action that was noted in this study.

I hope that my findings do not suggest derision towards Passive Posters or dissuade others from posting about political or social justice discourses on Facebook if they do not engage in high levels of offline political activity. Though the symbolic meaning of online political participation has numerous interpretations, political discourse that appears on Facebook keeps pressing political issues at the forefront. In the 60's, the feminist movement coined the term "consciousness raising" in reference to group efforts intended to raise awareness for social and political issues (Maeli 2016). Despite its low-cost nature online political participation serves a purpose and, at this point in American politics, I welcome efforts to engage in conversation, spread knowledge, and raise consciousness. As interviewees noted, it is our civic duty to be informed.

We cannot confuse absence of action with dissent, which is an intentional opposition that manifests in action. Neutrality does not remove a person from the political system, but makes them complicit within it. An individual that remains silent and abstains from political participation, online or offline, chooses indifference. Despite Passive Posters partaking in a low-cost method of political participation to signal care and interest, they assert their political beliefs and furnish an opportunity for others to engage. Though the efficacy of online political participation is suspect by

both scholars and this population sample, those that use this method of political participation take a public stance and renounce unspoken consent to the status quo.

However, expressive political participation is not enough to catalyze change. People that seek to make a meaningful difference must participate in purposeful and instrumental action and directly engage with local and national issues. We cannot soberly acquiesce to the dominant voices and discourses that so often dictate our political reality, but must shoulder the duty to be an agent of change. To truly be a political participant requires meaningful and committed action, with motivation beyond social approval.

There are notable constraints to offline political action, which often contribute to online political participation being one of the few methods of participation individuals can use to express concern and alliance. Disability may inhibit an individual from participating in a march, or being able to read or listen to current news. One's economic position can diminish their ability to donate money to non-profit organizations. Systemic barriers may inhibit someone from instrumental action, such as having time off work to cast a vote. Gender and race act independently but also intersect to influence one's disposable time and energy in ways that can marginalize already oppressed voices. These barriers arise and persist in intersectional ways and it is certainly reasonable that high levels of political participation are not a priority. Online political participation may be the only achievable method of taking action. However, for those that have the privilege and ability to partake in offline political action, I consider it an implicit duty.

Future scholarship in this area of study might consider how intersectional identities influence engagement in online political participation. This study did not note race or gender out of concern that, when associated with group behaviors, it would be possible to identify participants in a small campus community. Future studies may look at how different SNSs represent different types of spaces to users, as Facebook's social nature made it an unlikely space for some interviewees to bring political matters. Similarly, analysis of motivation behind online political participation as it differs between SNSs (e.g. tumblr vs. Facebook) can further illustrate the social and personal incentives that drive online political participation. Scope of insight would likely be heightened with a larger sample size.

In conclusion, I hope that the political conversations we encounter online do not enervate us into apathy and irreverence towards our role in the greater political system. I fear that Facebook posts generate complacency in the audience as frequent reminders of injustice, brutality, and abuses of power come to appear as the status quo. Being informed is necessary, but it is crucial to partake in higher levels of political participation to the extent that our constraints allow. I encourage people to seek thoughtful and enlightening conversation on the pressing social and political issues of today but also, as one interviewee noted, "put meaning to your words." Political action must transcend desire for social approval to be instrumental to propel meaningful change. Representing oneself as a political participant will never be enough to instigate political or social change. We must act as the political participants we aspire to be and hope that others will be inspired to do the same.

APPENDIX A

In this appendix, you will find a copy of the survey completed by participants. This is a paper version of the survey, which is identical in substance to the online survey.

The following survey will ask you questions concerning the extent of your engagement with Facebook, behaviors and motivations surrounding your engagement, and what you think about your Facebook use. Some questions may ask you to reflect on your behaviors and your motivations behind them. These questions may be personal in nature and may cause temporary discomfort, but no more than that encountered in daily life. There will be no direct benefit from responding to this survey. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and at any point you can choose to not participate with no adverse consequences and your results will not be recorded. This survey is not meant to be harmful in any way. Completing this survey will take 10-15 minutes.

This survey was created to research and gain insight into behavior on Facebook for my senior thesis. All responses will be kept confidential on a password-protected laptop only accessible to myself. If written responses are used in my final thesis, the writer will be referred to anonymously or by their year and major. To participate in this survey, you must be at least 18 years old. In case of further inquiry please contact my thesis advisor, Michelle Janning, at janninmy@whitman.edu or (509) 527-4952.

By clicking to the next screen, you are agreeing that you are a current Whitman student, have a Facebook account, and that you are consenting to participate in this survey.

Best, Julia Buschmann

buschmjr@whitman.edu(907) 518-9031

The following questions on demographic data will be used to study group behaviors, such as frequencies of certain behaviors that vary by year in college or by major. If written responses are used in the final thesis, they will be referred to by 'year in college' and by the 'major or intended major' (not by the 'second major').

Q1 What is your year in college?

First year (1)

Second year (2)

Third year (3)

Fourth year (4)

Fifth year (5)

Q2 What is your major or intended major?

Anthropology (1)

Art (2)

Art History and Visual Culture Studies (3)

Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (4)

Astronomy (5)

BBMB (6)

Biology (7)

Biology - Environmental Studies (8)

Biology - Geology (9)

Chemistry (10)

Chemistry - Environmental Studies (11)

Chemistry - Geology (12)

Classics (13)

Computer Science (14)

Economics (15)

Economics - Mathematics (16)

Economics - Environmental Studies (17)

English (18)

Environmental Humanities (19)

Film and Media Studies (20)

French (21)

Gender Studies (22)

Geology (23)

Geology - Astronomy (24)

Geology - Environmental Studies (25)

Geology - Physics (26)

German Studies (27)

History (28)

History - Environmental Studies (29)

Mathematics (30)

Mathematics - Physics (31)

Music (32)

Philosophy (33)

Physics (34)
Physics - Astronomy (35)
Physics - Environmental Studies (36)
Politics (37)
Politics - Environmental Studies (38)
Psychology (39)
Race and Ethnic Studies (40)
Religion (41)
Rhetoric Studies (42)
Sociology (43)
Sociology - Environmental Studies (44)
Spanish (45)
Theatre and Dance (46)

Q3 Do you have a minor or a second major? Please list it here using the format 'minor: Japanese; second major: Economics'

Q4 What is your gender?

Female (1)

Male (2)

A different category not mentioned here (3) _____

Q5 What is your racial/ethnic identity? Check all that apply.

White (1)

Black or African American (2)

Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (3)

American Indian or Alaska Native (4)

Asian (5)

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)

A different category not mentioned here (7) _____

Q6 During an average day in the semester, how often do you check Facebook?

I often go multiple days without checking Facebook. (1)

1-4 times (2)

5-9 times (3)

10-19 times (4)

20+ times (5)

Q7 How often, on a monthly basis, do you post to Facebook?

I often go multiple months without posting to Facebook. (1)

1-4 times (2)

5-9 times (3)

10+ times (4)

Q10 Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent you agree that the following choices represent the content you post to Facebook. If there is something unlisted, please write it in the 'other' option and rate how much you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)
Photos with/of friends, family, a recent event, etc. (1)				
General information (e.g. upcoming events) (2)				
Funny thoughts (3)				
Information and/or news on government officials, elections, the electoral college, and/or candidates (4)				
Information and/or news on current policy or policy changes (10)				
Social justice oriented information and/or news (9)				
Personal thoughts/feelings on political and/or social justice oriented news and/or information (5)				
Life updates (e.g. moving to a new city, graduating college, etc.) (6)				
Personal milestones (e.g. completing a marathon) (7)				
Other (8)				

Q11 Considering your responses above, why do you post what you do post?

Display This Question:

If: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Information and/or news on government officials, elections, the electoral college, and/or candidates - Strongly Agree Is Selected

Or: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Information and/or news on government officials, elections, the electoral college, and/or candidates - Agree Is Selected

Q12 You checked strongly agree or agree to 'information and/or news on government officials, elections, the electoral college, and/or candidates.' Please briefly explain what prompts you to share this specific information through Facebook posts.

Display This Question:

If: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Information and/or news on current policy or policy changes - Strongly Agree Is Selected

Or: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Information and/or news on current policy or policy changes - Agree Is Selected

Q13 You checked strongly agree or agree to 'information and/or news on current policy or policy changes.' Please briefly explain what prompts you to share this specific information through Facebook posts.

Display This Question:

If: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Social justice oriented information and/or news - Strongly Agree Is Selected

Or: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Social justice oriented information and/or news - Agree Is Selected

Q13 You checked strongly agree or agree to 'social justice oriented information and/or news.' Please briefly explain what prompts you to share this specific information through Facebook posts.

Display This Question:

If: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Personal thoughts/feelings on political and/or social justice oriented news and/or information - Strongly Agree Is Selected

Or: Consider the usual substance of the posts that you make to Facebook. Please rate to what extent... Personal thoughts/feelings on political and/or social justice oriented news and/or information - Agree Is Selected

Q13 You checked strongly agree or agree to 'personal thoughts/feelings on political and/or social justice oriented news.' Please briefly explain what prompts you to share this specific information through Facebook posts.

Q14 Please rate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)
I am more outspoken about my opinions on Facebook than offline. (1)				
I feel like I can share my opinion more freely on Facebook than offline. (2)				

<p>I like that I can put forethought into what I write on Facebook before sharing it with friends. (3)</p> <p>I consider myself a politically aware and engaged person. (4)</p> <p>I use Facebook as a source for reading political news or commentary. (5)</p> <p>I frequently like or comment on friends' posts about political and/or social justice topics. (6)</p> <p>I follow political and/or social justice oriented pages on Facebook. (7)</p> <p>My political or social justice oriented behavior (through posting, commenting, and/or sharing) on Facebook is similar in tone and viewpoint to my politically oriented behavior offline. (8)</p> <p>I comment, like, or share information about political and/or social justice issues because it makes me feel meaningful in a broader context. (9)</p> <p>I comment, post, or share about political issues online because I want to be seen as a politically engaged person. (10)</p>				
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Q15 Thank you for partaking in this survey! This research looks at how one's relationship to their online self is constructed through engagement with political information and news. There is significant nuance and variation to the ways that individuals think of themselves in social interaction and Facebook offers an additional space for this to occur. This research will be furthered by voluntary interviews, which provide the opportunity for one to articulate their thoughts and motivations behind their beliefs and behavior. Would you be willing to partake in a thirty minute, in-person interview on this topic? If yes, please input your information below. Your contact information will be kept confidential on a password-protected laptop only available to myself, and your survey response will remain confidential.

Name (1)

Whitman Email (2)

APPENDIX B

In this appendix, you will find a copy of the interview questions. This was not provided to the interviewee, but referenced by myself during the interview.

Thesis Interview Questions

Interview Reference Number: _____

Year in College: _____

Major or Intended Major: _____

Gender: _____

Note: Interviewee's will be asked to briefly review their recent Facebook activity.

The 'Facebook Self'

1. Can you explain your relationship to Facebook? How often do you check Facebook and post to Facebook? What kind of pages and groups do you follow? Multiple times a day, once a day, a few times a week? Whether rarely or frequently, why?
2. Is there behavior that you don't express in online spaces but do in offline spaces? Such as swearing in real life but not online, pursuing interests/pages online that you don't pursue in your real life. Why do you choose to express them online? Do you feel more comfortable sharing your thoughts online?
3. Online social networking sites offer the opportunity for controlled social interaction. On Facebook, we gain a degree of discretion towards the information that we choose to reveal. Do you utilize this? Are you more careful or intentional with your online social presence than your offline presence? Why is that?
4. Do you feel that your Facebook/online self is an extension or a consistent representation of your offline self? Alternatively, you may see your profile as complimentary to your identity offline or as a completely different entity and separate from your offline identity.
5. Do you interact differently on Facebook than you do in real life? If yes, what do you think causes this difference? If no, in what ways are your behaviors consistent?

Political Engagement

6. Do you consider yourself a politically engaged or aware person? If yes, in what ways and spaces do you engage with political/social justice issues? (e.g. in classroom settings, casual discussion with friends, through readings for classes, through advocacy and/or volunteer work, positions in student organizations, through the news you read, etc.) If no, why not?
7. How does this translate into the interactions you have on Facebook, posts that you comment on, and the Facebook pages (such as candidates, politicians, social issues) that you like? Are they consistent with one another? For example, you may be less likely to state your opinion offline in interactions with friends, but you may feel more comfortable posting your thoughts online.
8. Do posts, shares, or online interactions act as a way for you to assert, maintain, or affirm your offline political engagement? Why or why not?
9. Why do you choose to, or choose not to, post about political issues? What do your political posts mean or represent to you? Are there times where you consider posting or sharing something but you choose to not share it?
10. In a typical month, how frequently do you post to Facebook or share something on Facebook about political and/or social justice issues?
11. Compared to one year ago today, has your level of political behavior on Facebook changed?
12. If you do post about political or social justice issues to Facebook, can you show me a post and discuss your thought process behind your decision to post? Do you feel comfortable with me taking screenshots? All personal, identifying information would be de-identified if it were to be used in my final thesis.

APPENDIX C

In this appendix, you will find a copy of the codebook developed inductively after transcription of the interviews.

INTERVIEW DATASET CODEBOOK		
SPSS Variable Name	Form item/explanation	SPSS/Excel Coding
Interview Number	Reference number	
Dem_Year	Year in college	1=freshman, 2=sophomore, 3=junior, 4=senior, 5=senior
Dem_Major	Interviewee's major or intended major	1=hard sciences, 2=soft sciences
Dem_Gender	Interviewee's gender	1=female, 2=male, 3=another category
Freq_check	Frequency of checking Facebook	# of times they check in a day, if given a range code the average
Freq_post	Frequency of posting to Facebook	# of times they post per month, if given a range code the average
Follow_orgs	Major organizations or non-profits, e.g. ACLU	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Follow_movements	Social movements, e.g. Black Lives Matter	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Follow_news	News sources, e.g. New York Times	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Follow_cand	Political candidates, e.g. Bernie Sanders	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Follow_congress	Members of congress, e.g. Elizabeth Warren	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Follow_sports	Sports news, athletes	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Follow_ent	Entertainment, e.g. bands, celebrities	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Follow_campus	Whitman College related pages and groups, e.g. sorority, ASWC, etc.	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Posts_political	The interviewee posts articles about political issues	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Posts_social	The interviewee posts articles about social justice issues	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Likes_photos	The interviewee likes photos of events, friends, etc.	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Likes_political	The interviewee likes articles about political issues	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Likes_social	The interviewee likes articles about social justice issues	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Comments_political		1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_curate	Does the interviewee intentionally post about certain topics to curate or construct their online representation?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_discretion	Does the interviewee feel like they gain discretion/control on Facebook?	1=yes, 2=no, 3=indifferent, 999=unstated
Gen_comfortable	Is the interviewee more comfortable posting their opinions on Facebook than in real life?	1=yes, 2=less comfortable, 3=same as offline, 4=unstated
Gen_judgment	Does the interviewee consider the judgments of others when deciding what to post, like, and/or comment?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated

Gen_accurate	Is the interviewee's Facebook portrayal an accurate representation of who they are offline?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_sufficient	Is the interviewee's Facebook portrayal a sufficient representation of who they are offline?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_construct	Does the interviewee construct a specific representation on Facebook?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_aversion	Does the interviewee have an aversion to posting about and/or engaging in discourses about political/social justice oriented discussions online?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Aver_align	The interviewee indicates that they don't want to align themselves with the group that tends to post about political issues by posting	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Aver_reason	What is their reason for their aversion?	Written explanation
Gen_understate	The interviewee indicates that they understate the importance of an interest or concern on Facebook	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_permanence	Does the interviewee independently indicate an aversion to the permanence of Facebook?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_source	Does the interviewee consider Facebook a source of political information?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Gen_inadequate	Does the interviewee consider Facebook as an inadequate space to discuss political/social justice topics?	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Inad_reason	Why do they feel that it is an inadequate platform?	Written explanation
Pol_news	The interviewee reads politically oriented news	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Pol_discussion	The interviewee engages with discussion about political/social justice issues	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Pol_classes	The interviewee encounters discussion of political or social justice issues in classrooms	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Pol_march		1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Pol_volunteer	The interviewee partakes in volunteer work that they consider to be related to social justice work	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Pol_st_org	The interviewee partakes in student government or a student organization	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Pol_work	The interviewee partakes in paid work that is related to social justice work	1=yes, 2=no, 999=unstated
Pol_motivation	If an interviewee does post about	1=generate awareness/spread

	political/social justice related issues, what is their motivation for doing so?	information, 2=being seen as aware of political happenings, 3=share my opinion, 4=?, 5=does not post political information, 999=unstated
Pol_assert		1=yes, 2=no, 3=does not politically participate on Facebook, 999=unstated
Pol_affirm		1=yes, 2=no, 3=does not politically participate on Facebook, 999=unstated
Pol_maintain		1=yes, 2=no, 3=does not politically participate on Facebook, 999=unstated
Election_offline	The interviewee has become more aware as a product of the election, seen in their offline sense of awareness	1=yes, 2=no
Election_online	The interviewee has become more aware as a product of the election, their behavior changed online	1=yes, 2=no

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ⁱ This provision of the ACA mandated that “women’s health” be covered by insurance, a blanket term for health treatment related to reproductive control, STD screening, access to mammograms, etc.

ⁱⁱ In a study that is not of direct connection to this literature review, Kraut et al. (1998) monitored the Internet use of 38 families that previously did not have access to Internet based technologies and noted the changes in the general dispositions of the new users. The authors noted that: “The paradox we observe, then, is that the Internet is a social technology used for communication with individuals and groups, but it is associated with declines in social involvement and the psychological well-being that goes with social involvement” (1998:1029). Despite the Internet accommodating an increase in socializing, the users experienced a decline in well being relative to their pre-Internet assessment. Though this scholarship is dated, the isolation that accompanies Internet use remains current.

ⁱⁱⁱ The “real-name controversy” stemmed from Facebook regulating the names associated with accounts, which sought to ensure that fake names were not being used. According to Facebook’s ‘Help Center’, “Facebook is a community where everyone uses the names they use in everyday life. This makes it so that you can always find who you’re connecting with and helps keep our community safe.” As per this policy, names cannot include: symbols, numbers, unusual capitalization, repeating characters of punctuation, characters from multiple languages, titles of any kind (ex: professional), words or phrases in place of a name, offensive or suggestive words. This page also clarifies that the name on your profile should be the name that also appears on an ID, can be a nickname if it’s a variation of your authentic name (ex. Bob instead of Robert), and that pretending to be anyone is not allowed. Controversy erupted over the policing of names that may not fit within policy guidelines due to multiple capitalizations within a first name or a surname that uses words. Native Americans were unfairly targeted by this policy, because they often have surnames that utilize words rather than Anglo-American names. For example, Robin Kills The Enemy, a member of the Sioux Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, had her account deactivated after Facebook believed that she was using a fake name on the site (Ramos 2009).

^{iv} Facebook now uses software that tags a friend in a photo using facial recognition.

^v The meaning of the term ‘woke’ differs by source, usually shifting around a question of motivation. According to urban dictionary, ‘woke’ is defined, “A state of enlightened understanding, particularly related to issues of race and social justice. Someone who is woke is aware of issues of injustice and inequality, unlike those who might say they are colorblind” (2016). Another contributor’s definition suggests the term is strictly negative: “A state of perceived intellectual superiority one gains by reading The Huffington Post.”

^{vi} p-value of 0.00