#MARCHFOROURLIVES: MOBILIZATION OF A GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

MOVEMENT ON TWITTER

by

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, this work is dedicated to the seventeen victims of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting on February 14, 2018: Alyssa Alhadeff, Scott Beigel, Martin Duque, Nicholas Dworet, Aaron Feis, Jaime Guttenberg, Chris Hixon, Luke Hoyer, Cara Loughran, Gina Montalto, Joaquin Oliver, Alaina Petty, Meadow Pollack, Helena Ramsay, Alex Schachter, Carmen Schentrup, and Peter Wang. You will not be forgotten. I would also like to dedicate this to the organizers of March for Our Lives for giving me the inspiration to tackle the issue of mass gun violence. Thank you for your courage.

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ABSTRACT

Social media has been a pivotal tool in the mobilization of social movements in the past century. Digital websites such as Twitter provide a public space for individuals to be informed about current issues and motivated to act based on their personal attitudes and opinions. Though social media activism is flawed, it is a useful tool for the progression and success of social movement behavior.

This research focuses on the mobilization of the gun control movement March for Our Lives on Twitter. The present study uses an unobtrusive content analysis of tweets referencing the hashtag #MarchForOurLives from February 18, 2018 through March 24, 2018 to examine how social media portrays social movement behavior in the wake of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The examination of public discourse on social media following a national tragedy can provide evidence of how social media affects social movement activity and protest behavior.

After analyzing 888 tweets, I found that discourse on social media encourages protest activity through political extremism, fearmongering techniques, celebrity involvement, and online protest behavior. While social media fosters a public space for discourse, it also hinders notions of the collective conscience by emphasizing bipartisan disagreements on current issues such as gun violence.

I. INTRODUCTION

On February 14, 2018, a former student of Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, Florida opened fire at his alma mater, killing seventeen people and injuring seventeen more. Shortly after the shooting, student survivors of Marjory Stoneman began organizing to demand legislative action against gun violence. In the months following the tragedy in Parkland, the student organizers made their presence known publicly through attending rallies, hosting protests, and increasing their presence on social media. Their mission became clear as they took the United States by a storm exclaiming "We Call BS."

According to data provided to the Gun Violence Archive, there were 14,715-gun related deaths and 340 mass shootings in America in 2018 (Gun Violence Archive, 2019). With the lack of a narrowly defined definition of what constitutes a mass shooting, however, these statistics are problematic as they increase perceptions of fear and risk (Berkowitz et al. 2018; Borchers 2017). Historically, the definition of "mass murder" included four or more victims slain in one spree killing, though this definition became muddled when Congress identified "mass killing" as three or more murders in one instance (Borchers 2017). Although the government has never defined mass shooting separately, in 2013 the Congressional Research Service (CRS) identified mass shootings as incidents which happen in public places, "involving four or more deaths—not including the shooter(s)—and gunmen who select victims somewhat indiscriminately" (Bjelopera et al. 2013:4). The CRS report furthermore states that violence in this definition of a mass shooting is not "a means to an end," such as terrorism or robbery (Bjelopera et al. 2013:4). The following table provided by the Research and Development

(RAND) corporation outlines the various definitions provided for "mass shootings" and the different implications given by separate definitions:

Table 1: Variation in How Mass Shootings Are Defined and Counted

Source	Casualty Threshold (for injuries or deaths by firearm)	Location of Incident	Motivation of Shooter	Number of U.S. Mass Shootings in 2015
Mother Jones (see Follman, Aronsen, and Pan, 2017)	Three fatal injuries (excluding shooter)[*]	Public	Indiscriminate (excludes crimes of armed robbery, gang violence, or domestic violence)	7
Gun Violence Archive (undated-a)	Four fatal or nonfatal injuries (excluding shooter)	Any	Any	332
Mass Shooting Tracker (undated)	Four fatal or nonfatal injuries (including shooter)	Any	Any	371
Mass Shootings in America database (Stanford Geospatial Center, undated)	Three fatal or nonfatal injuries (excluding shooter)	Any	Not identifiably related to gangs, drugs, or organized crime	65
Supplementary Homicide Reports (FBI) (see Puzzanchera, Chamberlin, and Kang, 2017)	The FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports do not define *mass shooting* but do provide information on the number of victims, and the reports have been used by researchers in conjunction with news reports or other data sources.			

[*] Before January 2013, the casualty threshold for *Mother Jones* was four fatal injuries (excluding the shooter).
[*] Source: Research and Development Corporation, 2018

As seen in Table 1, having varying definitions on what constitutes a mass shooting has a large effect on rhetoric about how many mass shootings actually occur. The muddled definition of mass shootings created by the differing opinions of news outlets and political leaders has likely contributed to increased fear and the related perceptions of an increase in violent activity. On the contrary, researchers have claimed that violence and mass shootings are not on the rise, and that the perception of an increase in mass shootings is fueled by media sensationalism (Fox and DeLateur 2013). Regardless, there has been public outcry from survivors, policy leaders, and activated citizens to end these atrocities. For instance, the 17 deaths recorded after the Parkland, Florida shooting provoked advocacy for March for Our Lives, one of the newest gun

reform movements in America. Although previous public outcry and gun violence prevention activism has taken many forms such as protests, marches, and news coverage, the inclusion of social media networking brings this movement directly into the homes of the public. The ongoing rise in technology and online social networking has given the anti-gun violence movement its place on the World Wide Web, which is frequently seen on Twitter.

According to Small (2011), Twitter has "been central to breaking news by providing real-time updates," allowing the public to learn about and discuss important events as they transpire (873). Real-time updates on current events and tragedies such as the Parkland shooting make way for political debates and social movement activity on an international level, making movements such as March for Our Lives accessible to citizens from all over the world. This specific movement began in February 2018 in the wake of the Valentine's Day shooting, gaining its popularity through social networking on Twitter through the hashtag #MarchForOurLives. This hashtag is often used in tandem with survivor stories, calls for action, and motivational images giving members of Twitter the opportunity to share their stories, fears, beliefs, and support.

The activity surrounding the hashtag #MarchForOurLives makes this movement a prime example of hashtag activism, where individuals associate a meaningful hashtag to show their support for a particular issue. Hashtag activism is not a new concept and has been studied rigorously in terms of social movement frameworks emphasizing group solidarity, the public sphere and the collective conscience (Small 2011; Gleason 2013). Social movements and activism on Twitter such as this offer insight to public reactions of national tragedies and political ideologies, allowing the civic public to participate in

mobilization of a movement. Using a digital sociology approach to analyze mass gun violence prevention activism on Twitter, this study aims to identify how social movements are framed through social networking, and how these movements are mobilized to a wide audience. To do this, the following questions will be addressed:

1: How are gun control or gun reform ideologies presented through the use of #MarchForOurLives?

2: How are gun rights ideologies presented through the use of #MarchForOurLives?

3: How is social movement behavior in the March for Our Lives movement performed on Twitter?

II. PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Researchers agree that public awareness of mass shootings was magnified after high profile shootings in the late 1990s, yet the tipping point in calling for stricter gun control and the proliferation of gun violence prevention movements was not until December 2012 after the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting (Esposito and Finley 2014; Frattaroli 2002). Additionally, Frattaroli (2002) explains that social activism and gun violence prevention became popular in tandem with the rise of technology and digital social networks throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. With this relatively new inclusion of social networking sites in social movement activity, advocacy for mass gun violence prevention has begun to reach a larger audience. In order to fully understand and interpret social media mobilization, however, it is imperative to first understand the social factors which enforce the American gun culture and the underlying culture of fear.

Mass Shootings in America

Johnson (2017) and Parham-Payne (2014) assert that gun violence in America derived from a culture of fear that began through the implementation of ideological propaganda during the Cold War. Yet policies aimed to reduce gun violence in the United States did not reach its peak until the Newton, Connecticut shooting in December 2012. While the debate on gun violence often features issues of mental health or gun control, the portrayal of gun culture as a self-fulfilling prophecy which mirrors Durkheim's (1912) *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is prevalent through the collective action of Second Amendment support and the totemization of firearms (Johnson 2017; Esposito and Finley 2014). Esposito and Finley (2014) argue that competitive individualism has been created through neoliberal politics, which is used to refer to economic systems

which extend the free market to all public and personal spheres. Esposito and Finley (2014) further assert that these neoliberal politics encourage a religious-like faith in "the presumed powers of the free market to promote freedom and optimal order," leading to minimal political interventions in the wake of mass shootings and gun violence (76). Additionally, Kintz (2005) asserts that firearms act as cultural totems of masculinity, giving them a religious significance. This is clear through the American obsession with firearms for sport, and the cultural idolization of guns.

The neoliberal ideology which promotes pro-gun and Second Amendment enthusiasm is related to the dangers of a big government, the virtues of individualism and self-reliance, and the notion of gun violence being a personal problem of irresponsible or evil agents (Esposito and Finley 2014). Neoliberal ideology also downplays the social realm, further emphasizing individual concern for oneself over the concern of others, a trait which is common among those presenting hegemonic and hyper-masculinity (Esposito and Finley 2014; Kalish and Kimmel 2010; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Though many scholars believe that most mass shootings are products of mental illness or lax gun laws, the argument that these tragedies are the result of the aggrieved entitlement of a hyper-masculine culture is frequently addressed (Kalish and Kimmel 2010; Johnson 2017).

Aggrieved Entitlement, Delusions of Grandeur, and Toxic Masculinity

Feelings of aggrievement or being wronged by the world are typical in adolescence, yet the transformation from the aggrieved into mass murderers requires a sense of entitlement, or a sense of wanting to make others hurt in an act of revenge (Kalish and Kimmel 2010; Larkin 2009; Lankford 2016). In the context of aggrieved

entitlement, mass shootings which follow this idea of revenge or "delusions of grandeur" result in rampage shootings, a unique strain of homicide offenses which focus on random bystanders instead of specific victims (Lankford 2016; Larkin 2009). Kalish and Kimmel (2010) assess that this feeling of entitlement or obligation to take revenge is true to hyper-masculinity, as men who feel that they have lost their manhood through perceived disrespect or threats are likely to go to extreme measures to get their manhood back (Johnson 2017; Lanford 2016). The masculine nature of mass shooters is also shown to be statistically significant, as of the 101 mass shootings between 1982 and June 2018, 98 were perpetrated by only male shooters, while two were perpetrated by only female shooters (Mother Jones 2018). Only one instance of mass shooting within this timeframe was performed by both a male and a female. These statistics support the relationship between the hyper-masculine culture and gun violence in the United States of America, as young men and boys frequently use guns and violent behavior to create ultra-masculine identities (Kellner 2013). This relationship is also represented in copy-cat shootings, where a mass or rampage shooter uses a past tragedy to navigate his own decision making.

Research has found that the Columbine massacre where two students opened fire, murdering twelve students and one teacher, set the stage for future events and has become almost synonymous with the term "school shooting" (Kalish and Kimmel 2010; Larkin 2009). Since the Columbine massacre, the narrative on mass shootings which accompanies the desire for revenge has shifted, paving the way towards an idea of fame-seeking in "some kind of copycat killing sprees" (Johnson 2017:113). Between 1999 and 2007 for instance, eight school shootings involved the perpetrator directly referring to

Columbine as inspiration (Larkin 2009). The example set by the Columbine shooters made way for the use of mass shootings for fame, glory, and political statements (Larkin 2009; Lankford 2016; Fast 2008). In the case of the Parkland, Florida shooter, prosecutors found video recordings on his cellphone which explained his desire to be remembered along with all of the others who have committed a similar atrocity (Mazzei 2018). His admission of desire for fame, coupled with stories of his sense of loneliness and worthlessness follow the themes of aggrieved entitlement and delusions of grandeur (Mazzei 2018; Lanford 2016).

Mental Health vs. Gun Control

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooter's feelings of isolation and loneliness are common factors among those who have committed mass shootings in American history (Rocque 2012; Langman 2009; Fast 2008). Social isolation can derive from a range of factors, including mental instability or a lack of social integration. Emile Durkheim (1897) emphasized the relationship between social integration and suicide, explaining a theoretical typology which outlines the different effects of social factors and how they lead to suicidal thoughts. Regarding mass and rampage shootings, Durkheim's (1897) theory of egoistic suicide comes into play, where a person feels entirely detached from society and the likelihood of committing suicide by mass shooting is increased. As individualism increases in a technologically advanced and industrialized society, feelings of detachment also increase (Esposito and Finley 2014; Kalish and Kimmel 2010; Rocque 2012). Durkheim's theory of egoistic suicide overlaps with aspects of neoliberal ideology as well, as the neoliberal sentiment of individualism and having no duty towards others encourages egoism in modern-day society. Though many researchers have begun

to dismiss mental illness as a predicting factor for mass violence due to the increasing diagnosis of mental illnesses among adolescents, a lack of attention to mental health has a pre-existing relationship with feelings of isolation and desires to commit suicide (Rocque 2012; Langman 2009).

While it is important for researchers to identify the different typologies of mentally unstable mass shooters, it is equally important to understand the arguments which support stricter gun laws and regulation of firearms in America. Unlike researchers who claim the issue of mass gun violence stems from mental health and mental instability, Stroebe (2016) makes the claim that stricter gun control will lead to a substantial reduction in unnecessary killings, simply by reducing the number of guns in circulation. Stroebe (2016) explains that "the fear of being killed and the need of carrying a gun for self-defense might be more prevalent among Americans" than it is among citizens of other countries (12). The basis of Stroebe's argument is derived from a 1967 study by Berkowitz and LePage who identified the "weapons effect," a theory which states that the presence of a weapon provokes more aggressive behavior. After conducting focus group studies where individuals were intentionally angered, using firearms as the dependent variable, Berkowitz and LePage found that angered individuals were more likely to act aggressively when a gun was visibly present (Berkowitz and LePage 1967; Stroebe 2016). This study was meant to debunk the idea that a "good guy" with a gun can effectively stop a "bad guy" with a gun, as having a gun visibly present results in a higher likelihood of death by means of gun violence (Stroebe 2016).

Typically, the mental health argument of mass gun violence is led by pro-gun activists who believe reducing the number of guns in circulation does not reduce crime.

Although many scholars and citizens may posit that this belief is strictly conservative, research claims that the right to bear arms is also of broad interest to liberal political theory (Hall 2006; Hughes and Hunt 2000). Hall (2006) makes claims on the reasonable cost or necessity account of gun ownership, asserting that the right to bear arms rests on the necessary reasons one might own a gun, such as security or self-defense. On the other hand, the gun control argument posits the debate that fewer guns and stricter gun laws will drastically reduce the number of mass and rampage shootings (Kellner 2013; Stroebe 2016). Hughes and Hunt (2000) assert that "bans on guns are […] considered a 'liberal' policy" yet this is dependent on how a person perceives liberalism. They claim that the debate on bans or regulation of firearms centers around debate on government intervention and the causal nature of gun ownership on gun violence, as it an increase or decrease in gun ownership impacts lethal gun violence respectively. Yet in a liberal setting, this causal relationship does not justify a governmental ban on gun ownership (Hughes and Hunt 2000).

Racial Narratives

While hyper-masculinity, mental illness, delusions of grandeur, and aggrieved entitlement appear as common themes in the existing research of mass violence, racial discrepancies also play an important role. Kalish and Kimmel (2010) assert that "before 1982, school shootings were more typically carried out by a young black male, in an inner-city school, using a handgun, who selected his targets specifically to avenge a specific event" (451-452). Mass shootings on the other hand are frequently done by individuals who are white (Johnson 2017; Parham-Payne 2014). In fact, Parham-Payne (2014) notes that more black people fall victim to gun violence than white people in

general, whether at the hands of mass shooters, individual-level crime, or institutionalized racism. This is problematic mostly due to media representations of mass shootings versus violence in inner-city neighborhoods.

While violence in inner-city neighborhoods is widely known, it does not create the same call-to-action as the mainstream mass shootings with very high death rates (Johnson 2017; Parham-Payne 2014). The use of black versus white narratives in gun violence debates takes away from the existence of a major public health issue which is exacerbated by the American gun culture (Johnson 2017; Esposito and Finley 2014; Lankford 2016). Furthermore, while mass gun violence is a predominantly white male response to aggrievement and perceived victimization, movements towards gun violence prevention are also typically led by white men (Frattaroli 2002). There is limited research on the relationship between white male aggrievement and white male activism, though it is suggested that this relationship is due to power dynamics of post-Civil Rights movements, as privileged white men are more able to both purchase a gun and gain the attention to lead a successful social movement (Frattaroli 2002; Parham-Payne 2014).

Upon the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States, the term "postracial" was coined, alleging the irrelevance of racism in current American culture (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). Many scholars, however, posit that race and racism are still relevant in today's culture of fear, and on many occasions racist motives have led to false imprisonment, misrepresentation, and death among People of Color (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). By stereotyping and criminalizing black individuals in the United States, society is reducing focus on predominantly white male mass shooters, further emphasizing the moral panic that people of color are inherently dangerous. It is

imperative that researchers emphasize the racial narratives which perpetuate racist

ideologies, and further ignore the dangers of white male hyper-masculinity.

Social Media and Social Movements

Throughout the development of the information age, scholars have questioned the

usefulness of social media regarding social movement activity. Kidd and McIntosh

(2016) argue that while social media and technology provide important tools for

communication in the mobilization of social movements, real-world connections and

collaboration are required. Opposing the idea that social media is a useful tool, Gladwell

(2010) argues that social movements can only succeed through "high-risk" activism, and

views social media as a low-risk activity. These varying opinions represent the separation

of dismissive and optimistic opinions of technology and social media, where some

individuals believe social media has influenced social movement mobilization in a

positive way, and others believe social media has little to no effect at all (Valenzuela

2013; Kidd and McIntosh 2016).

Kidd and McIntosh (2016) separated opinions about social media into three

specific archetypes: techno-optimism, techno-pessimism, and techno-ambivalence.

Techno-optimists are typically embodied through excitement about new technologies and

their ability to foster quick assembly around specific social causes or concerns. Techno-

pessimists see social media as hyperbolic or superficial when dealing with social

movements. Techno-ambivalence is somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, and those

who are ambivalent towards new technologies are more likely to see social media as

more of a resource than a mobilizer for movements. Many researchers argue that the

inclusion of social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter should be viewed from a lens

of techno-ambivalence, as social media appears to be a large part of today's movements, yet social movement mobilization also requires a life offline (Kidd and McIntosh 2016; Valenzuela 2013).

Scholars have identified that there is a positive relationship between social media use and activism, or protest behavior (Valenzuela 2013; Kidd and McIntosh 2016). While some scholars believe that technology and social media are indicative of choreographed action which strengthens the dominance of major corporations, others have identified social media as an important tool which encourages people to participate (Morozov 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Kidd and McIntosh 2016). Valenzuela (2013) explains that frequent consumption of the news, which is more readily available with the introduction of social media, "enables political participation by increasing users' knowledge of public issues, political causes, and social movements" (923). As people become more informed about current events, they are more likely to join in protest behavior. Yet in the new digital age, it has been argued that digital culture has introduced issues regarding alternative or "fake" news and media spectacles (Kellner 2005, Mihailidis and Viotty 2017). Kellner (2005) identifies media spectacles as an intentional construction of events in the media which are reinforced by dominant social, media and political structures. In many cases, these media spectacles and instances of "fake news" are appropriated to fit a specific political or social ideology, often fueling "people power" through a relatively new style of propaganda (Kellner 2005; Mihailidis and Viotty 2017; Kavada 2018).

Though some research has found that those who are active on social media are more likely to engage in political activities, this does not mean that every individual who follows a cause is willing to attend a demonstration. Still, the presence of social

movement activity on social media does increase the odds of mobilizing information (Valenzuela 2013). It is common for organizations and individuals involved with a social movement to regularly announce identifying information on social media, such as names or contacts people need to know to get involved (Valenzuela 2013). Similarly, those promoting a social movement or protest behavior also release locations for political activity and tactical instructions on how people can get involved (Valenzuela 2013). With heightened activity on social media, it becomes simpler and more effective for social movements to mobilize to a wide audience (Kidd and McIntosh 2016).

Gun Violence Prevention Social Movements

In the construction of movements to end gun violence in America, two major themes arise: gun control and mental health (Frattaroli 2002; Johnson 2017; Kadra et al. 2014). This divide is often political in nature, where more conservative views idealize Second Amendment rights to gun ownership and view the issue of gun violence as something performed by sick, evil, and abnormal individuals (Johnson 2017; Frattaroli 2002). Those who support control and regulation of firearms tend to identify with liberal politics, claiming that there are too many guns, especially military-grade guns, in circulation (Johnson 2017; Parham-Payne 2014; Esposito and Finley 2014; Frattaroli 2002; Hunt and Hughes 2000). However, the political argument of gun control versus mental health has not been fruitful in the minimization and prevention of mass gun violence. Researchers have instead begun to identify the importance of community-based efforts, youth participation, and the framing of mass gun violence as an issue of public health to decrease individualism (Frattaroli 2002; Johnson 2017; Sharkey, Torrats-Espinosa and Takyar 2017; Corvo 1997; Hawkins 1999).

Historically, increases in technology and industrialization have led to increased individualism and isolation, which has a strong positive relationship with mass gun violence (Esposito and Finley 2014; Kalish and Kimmel 2010). In recent history, social media networks have increased community activities which had previously been diminished through the proliferation of technology (Small 2011). Frattaroli (2002) emphasizes the importance of community and collective efforts that represent common perspectives and interests. One important way community efforts are integral to gun violence prevention is the way collective action opens the door for survivors to have their voices heard (Frattaroli 2002). Survivors, or those who lost loved ones in mass shootings, emphasize the public health aspect of mass shootings, drawing upon emotions and outrage to create meaning and to mobilize related movements (Bhuyan 2018). Furthermore, these survivor stories act as a call-to-action, playing on the sympathy and empathy of the American public (Frattaroli 2002).

Mobilizing a Movement through Twitter

Meuleman and Boushel (2014) identify social movement behavior as a "broad network of (in)formal interactions […] that engage in collective action […] motivated by a shared concern about a particular set of political issues" (50). With the rise in technology over the 20th and 21st century, social movements have become difficult to separate from the general use of social media activism (Meuleman and Boushel 2014; Valenzuela 2013). In particular, the microblogging site Twitter has been pivotal to mainstream media and activist activity since its conception, as it provides real-time news and information as well as generates a space to discuss every-day issues (Small 2011; Turley and Fisher 2018). Furthermore, Twitter allows its users to connect their 140-

character posts to a specific issue through the use of hashtags, which can be searched through not only Twitters' own database, but also through popular search engines, such as Google or Bing, creating a collaborative online space (Small 2011; Gleason 2013). The use of hashtag activism, however, has been criticized by researchers for its apparent easy "slack" activity in which users feign involvement in the activity of a movement while doing little to nothing insofar as contributing to the larger picture (Meuleman and Boushel 2014; Kristofferson, White, and Peloza 2013).

"Slacktivism" is defined as "a willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support" for a societal issue, combined with a lack of will to enact meaningful change (Kristofferson et al., 2013). Kristofferson et al. (2013) also suggest that those who enact in "slack" activity frequently do so to heighten their self-worth or the way others may perceive them. However, traumatic and risky decisions within the realm of social media and Twitter activism are subjective, as what may appear to be "slack" activity to some may be a vulnerable subject to others (Meuleman and Boushel 2014). Furthermore, some Twitter activities in the form of hashtag activism has successfully become enacted into social movements and not-for-profit organizations, such as the Green Revolution, Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, and recently, March for Our Lives (Meuleman and Boushel 2014; Campell 2017; Gleason 2013).

Literature Gaps and Significance

        This research is designed to analyze the mobilization of a gun violence prevention movement on Twitter based on previous scholarship regarding mass gun violence and the use of social media in social movement activity. In recent years, social media activism has been widely studied for its ability to introduce social movements to a critical mass through public debate and the use of hashtags (Valenzuela 2013). Research has analyzed the use of hashtag activism in movements involving sexual harassment, racism, institutional inequality, and capitalism, yet there is a gap in research involved with gun violence prevention movements on social media (Turley and Fisher 2018; Campbell 2017; Small 2011; Gleason 2013). As digital platforms such as Twitter play a large role in the facilitation of political action both on and offline, it is important to understand their prevalence in the major issue of mass gun violence and rampage shootings (Valenzuela 2013). This current study aims to fill the gaps left by previous research and contribute to future studies regarding mass gun violence prevention advocacy on digital media.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

While the study of social movement activity through social media is not new to the sociological realm, studies of gun control social movements online is relatively new. To fully grasp how social movement mobilization is affected by social media, my study relies on theoretical frameworks from both classical and modern theorists. My analysis of the March for Our Lives movement on Twitter is guided by three theories: collective conscience, the public sphere, and Political Process Theory (PPT).

Collective Conscience and Social Change

Durkheim's (1933) theory of the collective conscience is a staple in sociological studies, acting as a groundwork for collective action and group solidarity. Generally, the collective conscience refers to a set of shared beliefs, ideas, and attitudes within a specific social group or society. In his work on the division of labor in society, Durkheim explains that "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own" (Durkheim 1933:162). Initially, Durkheim had analyzed the collective conscience in terms of "mechanical solidarity," where social cohesion was created through homogeneity between individuals in primitive societies. In modern industrialized societies, however, an "organic solidarity" emerged, functioning through a division of labor. Collective conscience from organic solidarity is drawn from the shared morals through interdependence between individuals and social cohesion based on how people depend on each other rather than the homogeneity seen in mechanical societies. It is due to specialization in specific fields from the division of labor that individuals depend on one another and experience cohesion in modern societies.

The collective conscience, whether seen through primitive or modern societies, is a social phenomenon which requires cohesion of values, beliefs, and morals which can be passed down from one generation to the next. Durkheim (1933) suggests that complex, industrialized societies share fewer morals and are subject to individual interpretation, which is clearly aligned within the American culture of fear and the American gun culture. Yet with the introduction of digital technologies, shared morals and collective conscience find new ground through social networking and blogging with like-minded people who share similar goals and ideals (Wynn 2009). Because social media offers a space to bring people together who share similar morals and beliefs, it is an important tool for the mobilization of social movement behavior.

Society's shared sense of morals, or what is right or wrong, is an important mobilizing factor for any social movement. When faced with atrocities such as mass gun violence, our industrialized and organic society shares a common consensus that mass shootings are unethical. Although there is rampant debate among those who support gun control and those who support gun rights, most Americans share the belief that mass shootings should be rare or nonexistent. Users on Twitter come from a variety of specializations, therefore individual Twitter users depend on one another for debate, resources, and information. This creates the cohesion and collectivity which amplifies social movement behavior on social media.

The Public Sphere

In his work regarding the transformation of the public sphere, Habermas (1989) identified the eighteenth-century public sphere as a space for individuals within a civil society to share dialogue on rational-critical debate. This public sphere rests between the

world of systems which is dominated by strategic action and the lifeworld, which is the product of communicative action. Habermas (1984) describes communicative action as discourse, or communication, for the purpose of engendering mutual understanding. The vehicle for communication and communicative action is the public sphere of rational-critical debate. In the eighteenth century, rational-critical debates occurred in salons or coffee shops in response to recent literature, often including only the educated elites. For Habermas, the public sphere was a bourgeois public sphere, leaving out the poor. Therefore, entrance into the public sphere was dependent upon education and ownership of property, giving only the well-read bourgeoise access to civil society and rational debate. Guided by the industrial revolution, however, Habermas suggests that the public sphere has shifted in modern society.

The structural transformation of "the public" or "publicity" is identified as a result of the growing power of mass media, or the press. According to Habermas (1989:2), publicity was once "a function of public opinion" but has now transitioned into an "attribute of whatever attracts public opinion". The transformation of the public sphere was a move away from homogeneity in the bourgeois public sphere, but it was also a movement towards a flow of information from the media and the state to the general public. Through advertisement from the government, major corporations and the press, the public sphere became reduced to individual consumption of television and the media without any real participation from the public. However, with the implementation of social media networks, the public sphere has the potential to once again act as a fundamental tool for rational democratic debate.

Through social media networks, individuals can share personal and

communicative data which stem from their societal roles and their affiliations, offering a space for the civic public to hold political debates and be readily informed by the mass media. This is especially prevalent when viewing social movement activity on social media platforms. Twitter activity, for example, is often engulfed in political debate about current issues regarding inequality or grievance (Small 2011; Gleason 2013). Following the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High, political debate about gun control skyrocketed on Twitter, demonstrating the possibility that social media can act as a public sphere for democratic debate. Still, research suggesting the prevalence of media spectacles and "fake" news critiques the use of social media as an avenue for rational political debate on social media, bringing forth the question of whether or not these spectacles reduce the effect social media has on mobilization (Kintz 2005).

Political Process Theory

Social movement theories focus on answering why social movements are mobilized, how they are created, and how they are significant in politics and history (Jenkins 1983). Doug McAdam (1982) coined the Political Process Theory (PPT), otherwise known as Political Opportunity Theory, in his research about the Black Civil Rights Movement. His theory asserts that for a social movement to emerge and to succeed, there must be political opportunities for change. Generally, activists and social movement actors are unlikely to engage in activist behavior if a political opportunity is not present, as the movement is unlikely to succeed. According to McAdam, in order for a social movement to make changes in an existing political system, three key components must be present.

The first component McAdam identifies is political opportunity. According to

PPT, without political opportunity, it is impossible for a social movement to reach its desired outcome. Political opportunities are defined as opportunities for change in the current political system, such as changes in equality, policy, or changes in common law. While this assumes that the desired outcome of a social movement is political in nature, McAdam suggests that "generalized political instability destroys any semblance of a political status quo," which typically encourages a collective action by all groups "organized to contest the structuring of a new political order" (McAdam 1982:42). The second key component introduced by McAdam involves indigenous organizational strength or the presence of networks and organizations in the community who want to see change. This includes members, established structures of solidary incentives, communication networks and leaders. Regarding social media activism, these communication networks are the primary strength, as they are established organizations of the aggrieved population seeking a change. Finally, McAdam identifies the third key element of PPT as cognitive liberation, or the strategic process of shared facilitation which creates a specific understanding to facilitate collective action. Without cognitive liberation, the first two elements alone cannot facilitate or mobilize a social movement. Rather, cognitive liberation and the collective understanding of facilitated action is necessary to get a social movement off the ground.

Social movement activity on Twitter frequently encompasses the three key elements outlined by PPT. Previous movements which gained momentum on Twitter, such as Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street, have been embodied by political opportunities. McAdam also states that social movements have the propensity to create political opportunities of their own, which is frequently seen through social media

activism. Using hashtags, such as #MarchForOurLives, or viral videos such as those of the March for Our Lives leaders chanting "Not One More," movements such as this expand mass awareness of their cause, pressuring politicians and legislatures to enact a change. With the ability to communicate freely online, many organizations make their presence known and motivate action through collective liberation when a trending hashtag matches their cause. Furthermore, organizations and individuals can use the indigenous organizational strength offered by the communication networks of Twitter and other social media to share information and spread awareness. While most demonstrations are held offline, Twitter can inform the public about other forms of action, such as moments of silence, school walk-outs, or virtual demonstrations.

This research intends to help navigate how multiple narratives on Twitter reflect themes from previous research to answer important questions regarding mass shootings and the associated movements to prevent such atrocities. For instance, do pro-gun narratives on Twitter reflect a collective conscience? Do they include discussions on mental illness, aggrieved entitlement, a culture of fear, or racial narratives? Similarly, do gun control narratives reflect these same things, or something different? Further, how is social movement activity displayed on Twitter? Through a theoretical lens derived from these frameworks of social movement behavior, collectivity and the public sphere, this study will aim to identify how individuals interact with one another on Twitter, and how these interactions reflect the social structures which accompany the bursts of online gun violence prevention advocacy in the aftermath of a mass shooting.

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze protest behavior and social movement activity on Twitter following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High shooting on February 14, 2018. With this research, I intended to evaluate how the current gun debate in America is performed on social media in a moment of grief following a tragic mass shooting. For this, I conducted an unobtrusive qualitative content analysis of 888 tweets which included the hashtag "#MarchForOurLives" for one month of activity, from its first use on February 18, 2018 through March 24, 2018, the date of the demonstration.

To answer my research questions, I analyzed each tweet with the coding scheme on Table 2:

Table 2: Coding Scheme

Part 1. Contributors

Categorize each profile as one of the following.

Official March For Our Lives Account (Including State Branches)
Other Social Movement Organizations
Politician
Celebrity (Athlete, Musician, Actor, etc.)
News
Journalist or Blogger
Other
Cannot tell

Part 2. Categories of Tweets

Categorize each tweet as one of the following. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Category	Definition	Example
Comment on gun control	Tweet includes a comment that supports gun control ideologies but does not include links to information or other sources.	3 out of 4 of the guns used in the Columbine shooting were strawman purchases (someone else bought the weapon). We must close gun show loopholes. VOTE for a politician who will help close those cracks. #MarchForOurLives
Comment on gun rights	Tweet includes a comment that supports gun rights ideologies but does not include links to information or other sources.	I march my butt to the gun range every week to practice, because if anyone tries to harm me or my son, I refuse to be at the mercy of their evil inclinations. #MarchForOurLives

Comment on protest or demonstration	Tweet includes information about a protest or demonstration, including links or other informative materials.	Find a March for Our Lives event near you,and register to join TODAY! #MarchForOurLives
Survivor story included	Tweet includes an artistic expression (poetry, etc.) in remembrance of a victim(s) of any mass shooting.	#IWillMarch for those 17 victims from my school who can't #IWillMarch for all of the people who were taken away from us due to gun violence #IWillMarch to make sure this never happens again for our future generations I will #MarchForOurLives
Historical reference included	Tweet references historical events that did not include a mass shooting.	STOP using USA CHILDREN to push a FASCIST agenda, TEACH them HISTORY! #NeverAgain is the HOLOCAUST remembrance slogan an event that is a direct result of HITLER DISARMING GERMANY! How INSULTING & thoughtless to use it NOW #MAGA #NoGunControl #MarchForOurLives
Comment on children's safety	Tweet highlights the importance of keeping children safe from gun violence.	I have a dream that one day children can be educated without fearing for their lives I have a dream that one day we can hold the NRA accountable for undermining gun control legislation I have a dream that one day we do NOT need to #MarchForOurLives
Logical fallacy included	Tweet includes a logical fallacy (ie: Slippery Slope, Ad Hominem, Red Herring etc.) to validate their opinion.	Republicans don't care about you. They don't care about your children. They only care about gun manufacturers and their donors. #GunReformNow #MarchForOurLives

These codes were created based on a combination of previous literature regarding gun violence, social movements, and social media as well as an inductive approach. For instance, themes regarding gun control and gun rights were derived from previous literature related to gun control and mental health, whereas codes regarding political extremism, the safety of children, and logical fallacies were identified inductively. This coding scheme gave me the ability to identify themes regarding fearmongering tactics, rational and irrational debate, opinions on gun control, as well as protest or activist behaviors. Furthermore, I analyzed the profile of each Twitter user within my sample to gain information about the demographic and personal use of the #MarchForOurLives

hashtag. Many people in my sample did not disclose demographic information; therefore demographic findings will not have a large presence within this study.

Unobtrusive Content Analysis

Qualitative content analyses aim to evaluate pre-existing data and interpret their meaning through a systematic approach to discover and report rich, textured data about a social phenomenon (Elo et al. 2014). This can be done either inductively through open coding or deductively through categorization and the development of a categorization matrix (Elo et al. 2014). Because my intent was to identify and analyze the use of social media within a social movement framework, I chose to use a combination of an inductive approach and schemes related to previous literature to my content analysis. By abstracting themes and codes from the data and previous research, and creating categories based on these findings, I was able to gain insights on how people interact on social media after the tragic event of a mass shooting.

Content analysis is cited for its use in uncovering biases and interpreting data to uncover patterns, trends or themes in social behavior (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). To interpret and analyze the patterns of social movement activity through the March for Our Lives movement on Twitter, a qualitative content analysis approach was most suitable for this current research. While some scholars argue that qualitative content analyses do not have the ability to remain objective and are therefore not trustworthy, this research offers reliability through the collection of well-saturated and appropriate data (Elo et al. 2014).

Through a method of qualitative content analysis, I identify themes related to social movement activity on Twitter more efficiently than I could with a quantitative numerical method. Examining activity of Twitter users' involvement with the

#MarchForOurLives hashtag offered insight on how people interact and express their ideologies on social media, giving me the opportunity to examine expressions of social movement behavior.

Data Collection

Due to limitations with Twitter's Application Programming Interface (API), I was unable to scrape, or extract data, for historical Twitter data using any coding programs. To protect the privacy of their users, Twitter does not allow the collection of data older than seven days. Because of this limitation, I purchased a dataset of 3,000 randomized tweets which included the #MarchForOurLives hashtag from a third-party site called "Crimson Hexagon". These tweets all fell within the date range of February 18, 2018 through March 24, 2018. This dataset was provided in the form of an Excel document which included the date, time, and user identification number for each tweet. Upon receiving this dataset, I used Google's random number generator to randomly select 1,000 tweets to analyze. Each tweet was then moved into a table for further analysis. Throughout the process of analysis, new patterns and themes no longer emerged once I reached the 800th tweet. Mason (2010) explains that having too large of a sample size in qualitative research creates the risk of data becoming repetitive and superfluous. Because the data I had collected was becoming repetitive, I used saturation to end my analysis at 888 tweets.

The purposefully selected timeframe of my data collection encompassed the start of mobilization for the March for Our Lives movement. On February 18, 2018, only four days after the Parkland tragedy, tweets including the #MarchForOurLives hashtag began to flood newsfeeds on Twitter. On March 24, 2018, organizers of the movement led a

demonstration in Washington, D.C. to advocate for gun control. This demonstration

swept the nation, though it was not confined to the United States of America. Protests

were also held in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and other international

locations. This specific timeframe offers the most potential for understanding how a gun

control social movement is mobilized on social media as well as how it begins.

Data Analysis

After carefully reading through and evaluating each tweet, I developed numerous

coding schemes to continue analysis. After a few attempts, I eventually settled on the

coding scheme shown in Table 2. Part of the coding process also including evaluating the

profiles of users associated with my sample. I did this to identify any demographic or

generational attributes of those who associated with #MarchForOurLives at its

conception. Unfortunately, many Twitter users do not readily disclose information on

race, gender, ethnicity, or age, therefore this information does not hold a large presence

within this study. However, many themes appeared through my analysis of my selected

tweets.

Within my sample, 120 tweets included imagery in the form of political cartoons

or artwork. These images were also analyzed through a lens of discourse analysis,

identifying the broad social, cultural and political context they represented (Daniels

1997). Analyzing these images provided the ability to understand modern-day ideological

propaganda through politicism and rhetorical imagery. However, some images included

within my sample embodied survivor stories and messages of hope. Each image was

saved and noted on my coding table, as imagery plays an important role in social

movement frameworks (Frattaroli 2002).

Throughout the coding process, I was most focused on how the mobilization of the March for Our Lives movement was presented on Twitter. Throughout my analysis, I coded for emergent variables related to fearmongering tactics, political extremism, celebrity involvement, and protest behavior. I also coded for themes related to past research and accompanied hashtags within each tweet. Most Twitter posts including the #MarchForOurLives hashtag was accompanied by one or more additional hashtags, the most popular being #GunControlNow, #MAGA, #NeverAgain, and #2A. I specifically focused on how these associated hashtags represented opinions about gun control or gun rights, as well as how they related to fearmongering tactics and protest behavior.

Focusing on theoretical frameworks of collective conscience, the public sphere, and Political Process Theory, I grouped each theme as they emerged into broad categories. These categories are both inductive and follow previous literature regarding gun violence and social movement behavior online, such as the American culture of fear and "slacktivism". Then, each category was assigned sub-categories regarding specific findings, such as techniques of fearmongering, political extremism, celebrity involvement, and protest behavior.

V. FINDINGS

During the time of data collection, the March for Our Lives movement had just begun activity on Twitter. Weeks after the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school, survivors banded together to fight for stricter gun regulations and a reduction in gun violence in such a way which mirrored Durkheim's (1912) theory of the collective conscience. Using hashtag activism and political debates, the March for Our Lives movement grew in popularity nation-wide, and even saw activity outside of the United States. With many Twitter users from places such as Canada, Colombia, and the United Kingdom chiming in on the discussions resulting from the student-led movement, advocacy for common sense gun laws reached international levels.

Following the shooting, activity on Twitter from the organizers and followers of March for Our Lives increased to thousands of tweets per day. In the span of one week after the shooting, the student survivors who founded March for Our Lives achieved status of verified accounts on Twitter and received numerous accounts of appraisal and disdain from other Twitter users. Valenzuela (2013) explains that there is a correlation between the frequency of social media use and political participation, and it is shown that this correlation is stronger in times of political upheaval or national tragedy. In terms of Habermas' (1962) theory of the public sphere, where individuals express their political opinions and affiliations in a public space, social media reactions to the Parkland tragedy show a heightened sense of activity within a civic public. Similarly, following McAdam's (1897) theory of political opportunity, a sudden traumatic event such as the Parkland shooting creates potential political opportunities. Still, the civic public on Twitter remains divided on many opinions and themes regarding political extremism, fearmongering,

legitimacy through celebrity interaction and protest behavior. Furthermore, the use of emotional appeal through survivor stories and individual accounts of the tragedy appear to emphasize the role of mass gun violence as a public health issue.

Political Extremism

Martin (2011) defines extremism as intolerance towards opposing beliefs or beliefs which are not in line with mainstream values. When faced with political arguments and bipartisan issues, extremism appears through the intolerance of beliefs regarding others' opinions on policy and change. Typically, political extremists are motivated by fear, anger, or hatred, and do not tolerate opposition (Lipset and Raab 1978). Scholars claim that political extremism is frequently seen in the forms of character assassination, inadequate proof, sweeping generalizations, and viewing opponents as the enemy (Martin 2011; Lipset and Raab 1978). This is significant on Twitter, as individuals use systematically distorted communication to insult those with opposing views while claiming their own moral superiority over those who disagree. Political extremism as seen on Twitter can be viewed through a lens of Emile Durkheim's (1912) interpretation of organic solidarity. As the United States has become increasingly individualized, maintaining society through shared morals and collective action has become weakened.

Twitter users who associated with the hashtag #MarchForOurLives demonstrated a difference in opinion when it came to gun rights or gun control. These differences in opinion were frequently accompanied with systematically distorted communication driven by anger and extreme notions of what is right or wrong in efforts to reduce gun violence. Politically extreme discourse throughout the #MarchForOurLives discussions on Twitter reduce the mutual understanding created through communicative action,

thereby hindering the use of social media for coordinating and facilitating action. Like

most societal issues which deal with politics, instances of political extremism on Twitter

throughout the iterations of the #MarchForOurLives hashtag can be viewed in a

bipartisan lens. Instances of both right-wing and left-wing extremism can be seen with

the use of fallacy, conspiracy and intolerance for opposing beliefs.

Right-Wing Extremism

According to Hale (2012), scholars have attributed a rise in right-wing extremist

activity to emergent social issues, such as immigration or internal conflict like gun

violence. This emergence of right-wing extremism is said to be hastened in popularity by

the inclusion of cyberspace and the World Wide Web (Levin 2002). Throughout

iterations of #MarchForOurLives on Twitter, political extremism from individuals who

identify as conservative or Republican is readily apparent. From the use of ad hominem

or red herring fallacies to the use of misguided facts or irrational arguments, there are

many right-wing tweets which follow the theme of intolerance towards opposing, or

liberal, beliefs. Such right-wing extremism can be seen in the following tweet by an

individual who identified as Republican:

> Liberals DON'T want the government going door to door to deport illegals
> who are here unlawfully, BUT DO want the gov't going to the homes of law
> abiding Americans, disarming them, and denying them their Constitutional
> rights. #MarchForOurLives #GunLawsNOW

First, the use of "liberals" has been common rhetoric for right-wing activists who

wish to take a jab at those on the left side of the political spectrum. Often used in tandem

with the term "snowflakes," it seems to be an attempt to demean or belittle those

individuals with a liberal leaning. Furthermore, the debate present in this tweet also

makes use of a red herring fallacy by discussing the unrelated issue of immigration, as

well as an appeal to ignorance. The founders of the March for Our Lives movement have

claimed on many occasions that their goal is not to take guns from law-abiding citizens

but is instead an attempt to reduce the number of mass shootings through common-sense

gun laws (March for Our Lives Founders 2018). By appealing to the ignorance of others

who believe gun control would infringe on their constitutional rights, this user

encourages other gun rights activists to fear government authority and disarmament.

Furthermore, this type of rhetoric allows political opportunity to emerge, as both left-

wing and right-wing activists are likely to be fired up by extremist messages, increasing

their desire and willingness to enact change.

In addition, Hale (2012) noted the increase of political extremism as issues

emerge. Whether the issue is related to the topic at hand or not, an increase in political

causes is positively related to an increase in extremism (Hale 2012). This is clearly

shown in the previous tweet, as the rise of public attention on immigration laws have

seemingly influenced this users' desire to engage in political debate online. Similarly, the

following tweet makes use of Islamophobia to make a point about gun control:

> *A Muslim plows people down with cars & trucks, blows people up with
> varying bombs, or shoots up a nightclub* Liberals: "NOT ALL
> MUSLIMS!!!" >>> *Varying races shoot up schools* Same Liberals:
> "WHITE MALES ARE EVIL!!! BAN ALL FIREARMS!!! ALL OF
> THEM!!!" #MarchForOurLives

This tweet, provided by a Twitter user who self-identified as a "raging gay

conservative," also makes use of the term "liberals" to demean and single-out left leaning

individuals. It also posits a red herring fallacy by introducing the political issue of

terrorism and Islamophobia, suggesting that liberal Americans are more likely to defend

terrorism than they are to defend their own constitution. Johnson (2017) and Parham-

Payne (2014) have also suggested that statistics point to the significance of white male

shooters rather than Muslim terrorists. Furthermore, most left-leaning activists do not

blame individual white male actors, but instead the system of male-domination and

hegemonic masculinity which enforces white male supremacy (Connell and

Messerschmidt 2005).

The use of right-wing political extremism demonstrates the way in which gun

rights ideologies are performed through instances #MarchForOurLives. Although plenty

of users provided factual evidence of their claims in support of the second amendment,

the number of individuals who resorted to extreme rhetoric and fallacious argumentation

appears to be excessive during the time of mobilization for March for Our Lives.

Crisis Actors

Shortly after the organizers of the March for Our Lives movement became a

media sensation, conspiracy was stirred among right-wing activists. For years, internet

trolls have painted a picture of crisis actors being hired to pose as survivors of various

tragedies. It happened with numerous mass shootings, such as Aurora or Sandy Hook, as

well as with the Boston marathon bombing. Survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas

shooting were treated with the same media sensationalism. The "crisis actor" accusation

falls under the realm of political extremism as it is an attempt to convince those who

support gun control that the terror of a mass shooting is a hoax, and that those claiming to

be survivors are merely pawns for our democratic leaders to push an anti-gun agenda. For

example, the following tweets explore the idea that the founders of March for Our Lives

are being paid to spread false truths about their fallen friends:

> #MarchForOurLives #FalseFlag #CrisisActors #2A #2ndAmendment
> #FloridaShooting #FloridaSchoolShooting ARE YOU READY FOR A
> HEAPING HELPING OF TRUTH ? THOSE SO CALLED "HIGH
> SCHOOL STUDENTS" SEEN ON CAMERA, SPEAKING ON TV, ARE
> NOT STUDENTS ! THEY ARE CRISIS ACTORS!

"#MarchForOurLives "Crisis Actors" & puppet Celebs PLEASE Educate yourself on History of How your Being Manipulated #Metoo #NationalWalkoutDay 1939 Hitler Shown at Rally The Children Who Walked Out Of School To Support #GunControl #SupportTheNRA #KeepAmericaGreat"

These users identify the student survivors of the Parkland shooting as "celebs" and "crisis actors," encouraging others to believe they are being manipulated by people who want to push a liberal agenda. Interestingly, both users who posted these tweets were self-identified as white, male, and veterans of the United States army. In other tweets describing the founders of March for Our Lives as crisis actors, users point out changes in survivor stories or how quickly these students went from losing 17 of their peers and teachers to becoming activists. Dave Cullen (2018) explains the speedy rise to fame among the organizers of March for Our Lives was purposeful, however. In order to reduce media attention on the active shooter of the Parkland massacre, they had to organize quickly, and put their own names on the headlines. The appeal to ignorance offered by right-wing extremists in the crisis actor accusation sheds light on the irrationality of debate on the social media public sphere.

Left-Wing Extremism

There is little literature on left-wing extremism on social media, though both sides of the political debate are guilty of using extreme ideology and language. The lack of literature regarding left-wing political extremism is troubling, as it represents the existence of bias in research regarding social media and the World Wide Web. While right-wing individuals within my sample were prone to the use of red herring or conspiracy theory, left-wing activists demonstrated a rhetoric of ad hominem and fearmongering. For instance, one Twitter user exclaimed:

How many have actually READ the 2A, or the Constitution? Those receiving #NRABloodMoney, how much does a life cost? #FloridaSchoolShooting #GOPNRA #MarchForOurLives #drainthenra FUCK YOU, #NRA!

Although this tweet also shares notions of fearmongering and the American Culture of Fear, it also includes statements which lean towards political extremism. First, the associated hashtag "#NRABloodMoney" is frequently used among left-leaning tweets containing the March for Our Lives hashtag. This associated hashtag suggests that those arguing for common sense gun laws view the NRA as the epitome of evil. Furthermore, the rhetoric used in this message is motivated by fear, anger, and hatred, specifically toward the government and the Republican party. In general, this enforces a faulty conclusion that without the NRA, or money the NRA provides to politicians, there would be fewer or no mass shootings.

In many ways, the terminology used by this Twitter user follows Habermas' (1989) criticism of modernity, which asserts that the "rational" of "rational-critical debate" has declined. Their debate holds little prevalence in rational or meaningful dialogue and instead resorts to profanity and extreme claims against the NRA. In addition, the lack of rational thought in debate maintains Durkheim's (1912) theories of weakened shared morals in industrial societies. Yet this form of extremism is sparsely seen in a real-world forum by the average person. Due to easy access, limited governmental control, anonymity and large audiences, it is easier for an individual to act towards political extremism online (Hale 2012). In another example, one Twitter user wrote:

What are they DISTRACTING from today. OR, is this just another day to INSULT AS MANY AMERICANS AS POSSIBLE? That does appear to be Trumps DAILY GOAL! #GunReformNow #BanAssaultWeapons #NotOneMore #MarchForOurLives

Many tweets such as this by individuals who identified as "liberal" or left-leaning specifically single out the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, in their arguments for gun reform. While the March for Our Lives movement specifically claims to fight for common-sense gun laws, those participating in the movement via Twitter often use their political ideologies as the driving force for their argument, suggesting a political opportunity for change in the current American political party. By emphasizing a disdain for the president elect to support gun reform and a ban on assault weapons, this Twitter user engages in a red herring fallacy to explain their intolerance to the opposing beliefs and values. Like the way second amendment enthusiasm and gun-rights are shown through right-wing political extremism, notions of gun control and common-sense gun laws are shown through left-wing political extremism. The use of insults, fallacy, and expressions of disdain for president Donald Trump demonstrate the irrational nature of the gun control argument on Twitter.

Another common mode of political extremism used by gun control supporters through the #MarchForOurLives movement involves insults towards the Republican party. Although the gun debate is not always a bipartisan issue, it is often brought up as a dialogue of Democrat vs. Republican. In many ways, this bipartisan separation of gun control and gun rights activism hinders the public health aspect of the movement which aims to reduce gun violence and national tragedies such as mass shootings. However, the gun control debate frequently turns towards the perceived laziness or uncaring of the Republican party, as seen below:

> Another young life cut short while Republicans waffle and equivocate. Do something, you worthless sub-human turds! #GunReformNow #GunControlNow #MarchForOurLives #EnoughIsEnough

Political extremism online is inherently polarizing as it pits people against one another on an issue that both left-wing and right-wing activists care about. The increased individualism online suggests a weakening of shared morals and community as well as a weakening of rational debate. In the public sphere created by social networking sites, individuals are prone to engage in debates riddled with fallacy and irrational thought. With the addition of ideological propaganda like that of the Cold War, many of these irrational debates turn to fearmongering and the proliferation of an American culture of fear. Still, some scholars suggest the usefulness in polarization in encouraging mobilization, as Hansen (2015) asserts that "polarized voters are motivated voters," naming them "more attractive targets for mobilization" (151). Like McAdam's (1982) discussion of cognitive liberation, such extremist rhetoric and behavior motivates individuals to act toward political opportunities.

Fearmongering and The American Culture of Fear

Researchers agree that media sensationalism of tragedies such as mass shootings increase the perceived risk of gun violence and furthermore exaggerate existing dangers (Glassner 2004; Johnson 2017). With new forms of mass media, such as social networking websites like Twitter, fearmongering and the American culture of fear reaches new audiences. Johnson (2017) suggests that the culture of fear began during the cold war through the implementation of ideological propaganda, though other researchers cite the recent war on terror for the heightened perception of risk (Glassner 2004). Regardless of its origin, the culture of fear as seen in America has many implications towards the fear of gun violence. In terms of mass gun violence, the culture of fear is

represented by vehement focus on shootings with high death tolls, especially when the

victims are school-aged children (Johnson 2017). According to Glassner (2004), there are

three techniques of fearmongering: "repetition, the depiction of isolated incidents as

trends, and misdirection" (823).

Repetition

Throughout my sample, the most commonly repeated word appears to be

"children". This word is typically used in tandem with notions of children being in

danger, or children being at the forefront of mass gun violence. The fearmongering

ideology which is often accompanied with the phrase "think about the children" neglects

the importance of viewing such atrocities as the Parkland shooting as a public health

issue which affects everybody (Corvo 1997; Johnson 2017). For example, one user

shared the tweet:

> #SecondAmendment The Great Excuse of the @NRA #NRA Fake patriots that push arm sales that kills American children ! #BoycottNRA #BoycottTheNRA #StonemanDouglas #BoycottNRASponsors #MarchForOurLives #NeverAgain #StudentsStandUp

This user, who openly associates with the #Resistance movement on Twitter,

suggests that the National Rifle Association (NRA) pushes sales which kill American

children. While it is true that most school shootings resulted in the death of one or more

children, this argument is rooted in fearmongering tactics. Regardless of the allegations

of corruption within and from the NRA, they cannot be held liable for the actions of

individual agents. Furthermore, mass shootings take place in numerous locations,

including concerts, bars, and malls. Emphasizing school shootings over mass shootings

suggests that the lives of children hold more importance over others. This emphasis on

the dangers for children continuously repeats itself among supporters of gun control on

Twitter. For instance:

> The senseless acts of gun violence is a public health crisis. A child or teen dies from a gun every 2 hours and 48 minutes in the United States. This November, let's elect officials who will protect Kids over guns. #gocaucus #copolitics #NotOneMore Stand up and demand from your elected leaders to #ProtectChildrenNotGuns! #NeverAgain #MarchForOurLives

This tweet repeated the emphasis that children are targets and uses an appeal to ignorance through the inclusion of a statistic which is not backed up by factual evidence. Tweets of this sort use the fact that many mass shootings happen in schools to incite fear that guns are inherently evil, furthermore reducing the public health issue of mass shootings to something that affects only defenseless children. In addition, this tweet and many others can be seen "as easy 'slack' activity," as it encompasses what researchers refer to as slacktivism (Meuleman and Boushel 2014:58). While this user does explain that it is time to demand action, they do not follow up with any significant forms of communicative action and instead base their argument solely on pathological communication which creates of terror (Habermas 1984).

This repetitive notion of the dangers that children face acts as a backbone for many individuals in support of stricter gun control, which seems to posit the idea that the life of a child is so precious that we must increase gun control measures to protect it. With the use of fearmongering, gun control ideologies are presented through a Eurocentric representation of how we, as a country, need to save our dying children. This, of course, did not go unnoticed by those who support gun rights and the second amendment. A self-acclaimed gun rights activist expressed:

> We may need some #GunReformNow, but these parents & teachers need to STOP weaponizing students and children. @TheDemocrats have no shame in using you [name redacted]. Pray you wake to realize that soon. #ENOUGH #MarchForOurLives #MAGA

This tweet suggests that gun control enthusiasts are using the survivors of the Parkland shooting, as well as other students and children, to fulfill a political agenda. This message calls attention to the fearmongering tactics of the political left in victimizing children and teenagers to push for stricter gun laws, exposing the repetitive nature of a need to save the children. Interestingly, there are very few tweets in my sample which use this fearmongering tactic in support of gun rights. While there are many references to the Holocaust or other major historical tragedies, as well as pro-life sentiments in messages supporting the second amendment, very few of them attempt to insight fear through repetition to support their claim.

Depiction of Isolated Incidents as Trends

Many individuals who made a post with the #MarchForOurLives hashtag were not only guilty of fearmongering through repetition, but also through depicting the isolated incident of the Parkland shooting as a trend. Research suggests that after the Columbine massacre, the narrative on gun violence shifted, and perpetrators of mass gun violence have since referred to Columbine as their inspiration (Kalish and Kimmel 2010; Larkin 2009). Yet that does not necessarily mean mass shootings are trending. In fact, research suggests that mass shootings are actually less common than they were in the 1990's (Nicodemo and Petronio 2018). For some Twitter users, however, the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school suggests that mass gun violence is an increasing trend. For example, one user posted:

> My kid is starting elementary school in 1.5 years. It blows my mind that NINETEEN years after a school shooting during the formative years of my life "Columbine" THINGS ARE GETTING WORSE! #MarchForOurLives

Although there have been numerous school shootings between the Columbine

massacre and the tragedy in Parkland, none have gained as much attention and momentum as these two. While both the Sandy Hook and Virginia Tech school shootings claimed more lives than Columbine and Parkland, neither sparked quite as much political debate and intense bipartisan division. Cullen (2018) suggests that this is because Columbine and Parkland had something in common; in both cases, the actual shooting was short-lived, but the students waited in the dark for hours before they could go home. Does this suggest, then, that mass shootings are the trend? Or does it suggest that the trend is, in fact, fear? By asserting that things are getting worse, this user postulates that mass shootings are the trend. Yet there is an entire field of research which supports a decline in mass shootings in recent years (Fox and Fridel 2018; Fox and DeLateur 2014). In a similar fashion, a post by one of the survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting states:

> It's going to happen again. There will be another mass shooting in the US unless we change our gun laws. In 2018 so far 8,786 incidents of gun violence and 2,343 deaths in the US. We must do better. March 24 #MarchForOurLives Get Involved in your community

The slippery slope argument used by this user provides statistics on gun related violence in America in the year 2018, yet there is no source or citation provided. Furthermore, this post supports the suggestion that mass shootings are currently trending. What they fail to understand, however, is that mass shootings are very seldom related to one another. The Vegas shooting, Pulse, Thousand Oaks, Sandy Hook, and every other historical atrocity were stand-alone incidents, regardless of whether they influenced a future shooter. It becomes problematic when gun control activists use these isolated incidents to portray their ideologies through instigation of fear. In another tweet, a user from Berlin expressed:

> Just another day in America. We need gun control. Now. Every parent with a gun thinks they're responsible until one day they slip up and their kid is dead. That's all it takes. #MarchForOurLives

Once more, the key term "another" appears in this tweet, suggesting that mass shootings are just another thing we can expect to happen in society. Throughout the month following the Parkland shooting, Twitter activists "spoke as if the tragedy there was the continuation of a trend and further evidence of an epidemic," in the same way politicians spoke about Littleton (Glassner 2004: 822). This tweet also suggests that not only are isolated shootings being depicted as a trend, but that this trend is inherently American. Seemingly, this ideology feeds into the American identity, increasing disaffection for those dissatisfied with the political climate and the president elect. Still, it is not only those who support gun control or common-sense gun laws who are guilty of this technique of fearmongering.

Those who support gun rights and the second amendment appear to treat gun control ideology as a continuation of a trend, but their messages seem to focus on a trend of genocide and government control. On many occasions, second amendment supporters make references to the Holocaust as an example of failed gun control and the slippery slope towards an authoritarian ruler. Although this commentary does not add to the creation of fear for children's lives, it ignites fear of the government. For example, one user tweeted:

> Honest question to the #MarchForOurLives protesters. Were y'all taught about Hitler and the Holocaust in history class?

This tweet references an argument that often reoccurs in the American gun debate by identifying Nazi Germany as "a regime whose gun-registration policies" enforced the disarming and annihilation of Jews (Homsher 2004:715). Although their messages are not

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specific to Parkland, the mobilization of the March for Our Lives movement increased

activity of comparisons of modern gun control hysteria to historical events. The type of

fear incited by the Holocaust argument is different than the fear incited by gun control

activists. This technique of fearmongering increases perceived fear of a tyrannical

government by questioning what would happen if guns were to be strictly regulated. Fear

of gun regulation can also be clearly seen in the following tweet by an account dedicated

to the Republican party with the specific goal of exposing hypocrisy of left-wing politics:

> Democrats and liberals are big advocates for gun control. You know who
> else was a big advocate for gun control? Hitler, Stalin and Mao.
> #MarchForOurLives

This tweet enforces an idea that gun control is a slippery slope towards a fascist

regime. Especially given the political climate during the time of mobilization for the

March for Our Lives movement, this is a slippery slope many Americans on either side of

the political spectrum could readily believe. By treating isolated incidences of

authoritarian rule as a possible trend, gun rights activists contribute to the fear that we

may one day need firearms to form an armed militia.

Misdirection

In my sample, misdirection was most readily seen in the form of red herring. Both

gun control and gun rights supporters frequently made the logical error of supporting

their opinions with debates that had little or nothing to do with the Parkland shooting or

gun violence in general. Among gun rights supporters, the most frequent misdirection

was a discussion of Planned Parenthood or abortion. In one instance, a gun rights

supporter tweeted:

> Planned Parenthood vs. National Rifle Association.
> Murders, • PP - 6,803,782 • NRA - 0
> Federal Money Yearly, • PP - $500,000,000 • NRA - $0

Founding mission, • PP - "Exterminate the negro population" • NRA - Protect blacks from KKK members. #MarchForOurLives

This iteration of misdirection specifically aims at increasing fear for People of Color and people who support pro-life ideologies. First, this tweet articulates an argument that Planned Parenthood is inherently murderous while the NRA is not. While neither the NRA nor Planned Parenthood are guilty of murder by the legal definition, the statistics provided by this user are not supported by research. This person used obscene "facts" designed to incite fear within those who oppose pro-choice ideologies. Second, this post suggests that Planned Parenthood's mission is to exterminate the "negro population," whereas the NRA was founded to protect People of Color. According to the official website for the NRA, however, the founding mission was simply to encourage rifle shooting (National Rifle Association 2019). This user specifically misdirected their audience in an effort to increase fear without so much as mentioning gun control or the Parkland tragedy. While gun rights supporters frequently used abortion politics as a form of misdirection, gun control supporters used expressions of what they believe to be a failed government.

Although most discussions from gun control followers used their disdain for the current American government to back up a specific claim, many of them used the Twitter platform to present their hatred for the government without referencing gun violence or Parkland. In many cases, misdirection from gun control supporters framed their misdirection through a sense of American identity. For instance:

> You're right that the government has failed America. We live in a country controlled by fear. Fearmongering rhetoric only creates more fear. I state my opinions on the matter, but the fact is that insulting a young person speaking their mind isn't American. #MarchForOurLives

While it can be assumed that this user is referencing the government failing

America through inadequate gun policies, this is not clearly stated. Instead, this tweet makes a general comment on what makes a person un-American. Tweets of this nature were sporadic throughout my sample, yet they appeared to be less prevalent than misdirection from supporters of gun rights and the second amendment. This could be because most Twitter users who used the #MarchForOurLives hashtag were in support of the movement and wanted to focus on the Parkland shooting. In fact, most tweets in favor of gun control mentioned Parkland, mass shootings, or gun regulations even within their techniques of fearmongering. This is especially true through the ideological propaganda offered by gun control activists, who typically supported their argument with political cartoons or other forms of imagery.

Ideological Propaganda

Like the ideological propaganda present throughout the cold war, a large majority of the tweets in my sample included imagery in the form of political cartoons or political statements. Through depictions of ideological imagery, it becomes very clear how both gun control and gun rights supporters use propaganda to support their claims through fearmongering. Those in support of gun control, for instance, often attached political cartoons of an oppressive government or cartoons of bodies lying lifeless in the street. Those in support of gun rights, on the other hand, often included images which contained quotations or historical evidence of failed gun control. The images provided by Twitter users follow suit with the techniques of fearmongering, as most of them are repetitive, they depict isolated incidents of mass shootings as a trend, or they engage in misdirection.

The inclusion of ideological propaganda in tweets regarding #MarchForOurLives

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mirrors similar movements throughout history. Just as propaganda was used to incite fear during some of America's most heinous wars, propaganda is being used to incite fear during a time of heightened attention to mass gun violence. Some of the images provided are brutal, as they depict pools of blood surrounding the nations' capital, or images of the president elect being forced on his knees by the NRA. The purpose of using images of this nature is to appeal to the emotions of others, increasing fear, anger, or grievance regarding a tragedy.

Legitimacy through Celebrity Involvement

Meyer and Gamson (1995) suggested late in the 20th century that the celebrity without a cause has become an anomaly, explaining how celebrities have been using their platform of fame since the 1990's to support social movements. This has become even more relevant with the inclusion of social media activism, as we have seen in the past few years. With Rose McGowan's expressions in the #MeToo movement, or Alyssa Milano's recent presence in the media regarding the Kavanaugh hearing, we can see that celebrity involvement has become a prevalent factor of social movement behavior. As celebrities use their spotlight to gain awareness of a political issue, the question of legitimacy comes in to play. Is a movement more legitimate because of celebrity involvement? Or is the celebrity seeking legitimacy through a movement? Does their involvement in a social or political issue attract more attention towards the issue itself, or the celebrity?

Celebrity Appearances

While celebrity involvement in an issue like mass gun violence can increase public awareness, the involvement of those with large fan bases can also "drown out some movement claims" (Meyer and Gamson 1995:187). This phenomenon is witnessed

through rampant advertising of musical appearances for the March for Our Lives

demonstration in Washington held on March 24, 2018. As the founders of

#MarchForOurLives mobilized people to join their demonstration, their message of

common-sense gun laws seemingly became secondary to many fans of famous

celebrities. For instance, the official Twitter account for iHeart Radio advertised:

> Ariana Grande, Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, Jennifer Hudson + more to join
> #MarchForOurLives in Washington D.C. on March 24

This post does not claim that any of these celebrities support the movement, yet

their participation in performing during the demonstration most likely gave attendees the

impression that these musicians supported the cause. By performing at the march,

celebrities gained fan support for their activity in the movement for gun control. For

instance, one user replied to this tweet: "Go for it protect r nation," while another

responded: "Women leading the way. Again.". Budabin, Rasmussen and Richey (2017)

suggest that the influence of celebrities on the mobilization of social movements is

largely driven by the risk they are taking. Because many political and social debates are

bipartisan in nature, celebrities taking a stance on one side or the other puts them at risk

of tarnishing their spotlight or losing a chunk of their fanbase. Even by simply

performing at a demonstration for common-sense gun laws, celebrities are risking losing

the appreciation and adoration of thousands of their followers.

Yet one celebrity appeared to gain more attention than others with her

participation in the March on Washington. Ariana Grande's name appeared in roughly 60

Twitter posts out of my sample of 888, a much higher amount than other celebrities. Yet,

by using Twitter's advanced search feature, I saw no posts by this musician referencing

March for Our Lives, Parkland, or Marjory Stoneman Douglass. Her contribution to the

demonstration is merely a three-minute performance singing her hit song "Be Alright".

By performing at this protest, Ariana Grande successfully convinced her followers that

she, too, wants to fight for common-sense gun laws. For instance, one user wrote:

> ariana is taking part in #MarchForOurLives she is so passionate and works
> so hard for the greater good i'm so proud of her.

This user's comment begs the question of how much work celebrities are truly

doing for the "greater good". Regarding Ariana Grande, her presence at the

demonstration could be explained by the events of her Manchester concert in 2017, where

a fatal bombing took place. Yet while there are various entertainment news sources which

cite this singer as advocating for gun control, there is little evidence that she has done

much more than perform and post a Tweet following the Las Vegas shooting in October,

2017 (Business Insider 2017; Variety 2017). The media attention given to her single

Twitter post about gun control has put this singer in the spotlight, further legitimizing her

as a celebrity who cares about current events. Yet there are no media references to her

involvement in any other activity regarding gun control. Still, her followers seem to be

giving in to her involvement, as another user posted:

> Ariana will be attending the #MarchForOurLives ! Not only has she
> advocated for equality and animal rights, she is now advocating for gun
> control. Ariana is someone who uses her large reach for good.

Like the previous Twitter post, this user identifies Ariana Grande as somebody

who uses her platform for a sort of "greater good". The question here, however, is not

whether she truly advocates for gun control. Instead, the important question is whether

her involvement legitimizes the #MarchForOurLives movement, or if it legitimizes

Ariana Grande as an advocate for change. Meyer and Gamson (1995) would suggest that

the activism shown through Ms. Grande's participation is nothing more than making a

general collective claim, which in turn gives her a status of caring about social change. Generally, her involvement in March for Our Lives can be viewed through a lens of slacktivism, as her attention towards gun control and common-sense gun laws has been nothing more than easy, slack activity.

Other celebrities, on the other hand, were mentioned due to their active involvement with the founders of March for Our Lives and the survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting. For instance, Dwayne Wade was complimented by many Twitter users for appearing at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High to express how he has been inspired by the student activists. The act of showing up without payment, without the expectation of performing, and with every intent on being active in the movement demonstrates Wade's active involvement with March for Our Lives. One Twitter user from Parkland, Florida explains:

> Much appreciation goes out to @DwyaneWade for visiting our school and showing his support. Changing the world, one dribble at a time. #MarchForOurLives

A similar post was submitted by an active member of congress living in Florida:

> @DwyaneWade WON'T shut up & dribble. We should ALL use whatever platform we've got to speak out and stand up! #NeverAgain #GunReformNow #StudentsStandUp #MarchForOurLives #MSDstrong

The support for Mr. Wade's participation in the movement which followed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High shooting suggests that celebrity interaction can help political movements gain media attention, which can often make or break a social movement (Meyer and Gamson 1995). Furthermore, celebrity endorsements in movements such as March for Our Lives can create political opportunities. For Ariana Grande, her participation in the March 24th demonstration attracts media attention. For

Dwayne Wade, endorsing and spreading the message of March for Our Lives has the propensity to pressure politicians and policy makers into focusing on reducing gun violence. In Wayde's case, his participation in the March for Our Lives movement suggests more than slack activity, referencing one way a celebrity can add legitimacy to the mobilization of a social movement. Yet throughout my sample, there are no other celebrities mentioned with the same appreciation as him. While a few celebrities such as Alyssa Milano or Oprah Winfrey shared links to GoFundMe pages supporting the survivors of the Parkland shooting, all other celebrity activity regarding this movement is limited to hashtags and performances at the March 24th demonstration.

Protest Behavior

Protest behavior has been identified as an important tool for policy making and implementation through public influence (Dalton, Van Sickle, and Weldon 2010). With the introduction of technological advancements, protest activity has increased, as people can enact in protest behaviors both on- and off-line and furthermore partake in communicative or cooperative action (Dalton et al. 2010; Valenzuela 2013; Habermas 1984). Research has discussed four ways social media can influence collective action or protest behavior, such as providing information, facilitating protests and demonstrations, spreading the word for others to join the movement, and the exchange of opinions (Valenzuela 2013). There are many theories about protest and social movement activity that seek to understand why protests or movements begin, but like Dalton et al. (2010), my goal was to understand the broader implications of how a social movement becomes "part of the repertoire of political action for a nation or individual" (2). Through a lens of Political Process Theory (PPT), I identified the ways in which protest behavior in the

March for Our Lives movement on Twitter has influenced collective action and protest behavior.

Mobilizing Information & Facilitating Demonstrations

Though research suggests that social media is typically used for social relationships, entertainment, or the construction of personal identity, it can also be used for the consumption of news and current events (Valenzuela 2013). In some cases, the consumption of news on Twitter can be incidental, as public information can be shared through tweets and re-tweets from friends, news sources, and celebrities. Regarding March for Our Lives, the most useful information provided involved information about mobilization. Like McAdam's (1982) indigenous organizational strength component of PPT, Valenzuela (2013) suggests that one key strategy to the social media influence on social movement behavior involves providing mobilizing information. Lemert et al. (1977) define mobilizing information as the information that encourages people to act on attitudes they may already have. In general, this mobilizing information inspires people to join a movement if their ideals already align with the mission.

Mobilizing information within this sample appeared to be offered only from those who supported gun control. Most of the mobilizing information shared within the #MarchForOurLives movement on Twitter was locational, regarding information about the time and place of future activity (Lemert et al. 1977). For instance, verified accounts for March for Our Lives, including different state chapters, frequently tweeted updates to remind their followers of upcoming events. One of the official chapters for March for Our Lives tweeted:

> March with us in Parkland on March 24th, and join the movement that is taking place across the nation. #neveragain #MSDStrong #MarchForOurLives

Tweets of this nature were useful for informing the public about events and demonstrations, as they not only informed their immediate followers about the March 24th demonstration, but furthermore allowed their followers to re-tweet and spread the word to a wider public. In terms of social media, this is a valuable tool for the mobilization of a movement such as March for Our Lives. Those who had heard about the Parkland shooting and were sparked with an attitude or belief towards gun control would be more likely to join the movement once they were informed about demonstrations such as this (Lemert et al. 1977; Valenzuela 2013). Gun control supporters involved with March for Our Lives were also sure to share mobilizing information about virtual demonstrations to assure their message could reach even an audience who could not attend a live demonstration:

> #SaturdayMorning If you're unable to go to a local march in your your state, you can still join and protest #GunReformNow online. Join us for the #VirtualMarch4OurLives March 24th, at 8am in all time zones. #MarchForOurLives #NeverAgain #NotOneMore

Sharing mobilization information about virtual demonstrations is an important tool for March for Our Lives, as it opens the door for extensive mobilization. Individuals who may not have participated in a protest due to location, time, or money limitations were more likely to join the cause given the information about their ability to access the movement. Those with pre-existing feelings about changing the gun control policy in America could act on those feelings and attitudes with ease as demonstrations were facilitated online.

By facilitating demonstrations and mobilizing information to a wide public on Twitter, contributors to the March for Our Lives movement allowed their mission and goals to be shared to a widespread audience. Although this could have been done through

televised media, newspaper articles, or other forms of advertisement, social media

provided an avenue for quick and efficient sharing of mobilizing information.

Furthermore, social media provided the possibility for those not directly affected by the

Parkland tragedy to join in protest behavior.

Mobilizing Structures Online

According to McAdam (1982), mobilizing structures refer to the presence of

social movement organizations (SMOs) within the community seeking a change. For this

study, the community of interest is the online community who associated with the

#MarchForOurLives hashtag on Twitter. On countless occasions, official accounts for

March for Our Lives, Everytown for Gun Safety, Moms Demand Action, as well as other

gun reform SMOs showed their presence. Many of their tweets included information

about protest activity which will be discussed as a framing process, yet many other tweets

included words of inspiration or calls to action. For instance, the official March for Our

Lives Twitter account tweeted:

<div align="center">We won't be silent anymore! #MarchForOurLives</div>

While this specific tweet does not say much, it follows not only McAdam's

(1982) concept of indigenous organizational strength as a key to PPT, but also follows

Frattaroli's (2002) suggestion that grassroots social movements require a "roar". For

those impacted by the Parkland tragedy, this sort of emotional appeal is a driving force

for joining the movement. For those impacted by other similar tragedies, such as the

Pulse or Las Vegas shooting, this same emotional appeal offers a form of comfort. By

making their presence known within the community on Twitter, SMO's provide a sense

of leadership, collectivity and communication at the birth of a movement (McAdam

1982).

Mobilizing structures are not only impacted by the specific SMO tied to the movement. When other SMO's or other organizations such as churches or schools get involved, the movement becomes open to a wider public. Those who may have heard about the Parkland tragedy but did not necessarily know much about the March for Our Lives movement were able to learn about the movement's presence through other organizations. For instance, the verified account for Moms Demand Action said:

> I think if you're old enough to crawl under a desk to practice hiding from a shooter than you're old enough to protest people being able to get guns to shoot you at school. @MomsDemand #MarchForOurLives

Moms Demand Action is a gun reform movement which focuses on reducing gun violence in America and was founded on December 15, 2012, a day after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. This organization was founded for moms to advocate for gun safety and has a chapter in each state in the United States of America. They have a massive following on Twitter, Facebook and in real-world settings. By making their presence known in tandem with the March for Our Lives movement and demonstration, they provided a gateway for mothers across the nation to take part. Segre (2016) contends that individuals or groups working together for a common purpose "experience society as a collective force," ultimately strengthening their shared morals, social bonds and collective conscience (30). While Durkheim (1912) identified shared morals and beliefs as becoming weaker in industrialized societies, it appears that this has potential to change with the advent of social media and the propensity for debate in this new public sphere.

In a similar fashion to Moms Demand Action, the SMO Everytown For Gun Safety was active in the mobilization structure of March for Our Lives on Twitter. Everytown is a social movement organization which was founded in 2006 and currently has over 5 million followers. They specifically cater to moms, mayors, survivors and

students, but their presence is nation-wide. In one tweet, they specifically mirrored

Frattoroli's (2002) suggestion that successful movements are led by survivors and young

leaders:

> Students and survivors are a driving force in the movement to
> #EndGunViolence. Follow their lead and join a 3/24 #MarchForOurLives
> event near you

The collectivity seen within the specific community in my sample as well as the

community of gun safety SMO's demonstrates the use of Twitter as a public sphere,

where individuals and groups come together to turn public opinion into public action

(Habermas 1989). Furthermore, by making a presence within the community of gun

safety advocates on Twitter, these SMO's made the March for Our Lives movement more

accessible to their followers.

Exchange of Opinions

Cho et al. (2009) suggest that the exchange of opinions, particularly political

opinions, on social media requires a greater amount of information processing and

reasoning, as social media lacks the availability of secondary signs in conversation. It is

suggested that participating in the exchange of political opinions on social media offers

an avenue for political learning, or a deeper understanding of some current event or issue

(Valenzuela 2013). Though many of the political opinions shared on Twitter through

conversations of March for Our Lives were riddled with political extremism, some

opinions encompassed ideals of rational debate. For instance, one user tweeted:

> Everyone in our country is at risk of suffering from gun violence. We need
> substantial change NOW. #NeverAgain #MarchForOurLives

Although this tweet relates to fearmongering techniques, it does not incite fear the

same way others do. Rather, this statement points to the argument made by Berkowitz

and LePage (1967) that the mere presence of a gun can affect levels of aggression and violence. By stating an opinion on the politics of gun change, this user is enabling protest behavior through an enactment of rational debate. Of course, rational debate requires the expression of multiple opinions and reasons. Although most opinions expressed throughout my sample were opinions supporting gun control, some second amendment supporters chimed in with questions and opinions of their own. For instance:

> So let me get this straight. On Sunday morning, the media put anti-gun students on TV from Florida to bash the NRA no pro-2nd amendment students who support protecting their schools. How was this fair again? #Realtalk #WaynesTake #MarchForOurLives

By bringing up the lack of second amendment students' involvement in discussions on gun reform provided by the media, this tweet suggests that the expression of opinion has been one-sided. Valenzuela (2013) explains that social media results in more goal-oriented communication than face-to-face discussions, which could explain why representation of second amendment supporters is lacking within my sample. Because most users who apply the #MarchForOurLives hashtag do so either to support gun control or act out in a form of extremism, there is little representation of gun rights activists who also want to see a change. In the end, this could hinder the March for Our Lives movement for its exclusionary orientation.

However, some Twitter users suggested that the debate on gun control is not a bi-partisan issue. Instead, these users identify gun violence as an issue of public health that everybody can agree on. This is an opinion in response to the Republican vs. Democrat debates shown throughout my sample and in the media. For instance, one user tweeted:

> We've said it enough, but I'll say it again. This are NOT about partisan politics. This is about protecting children and protecting Americans, something we can all agree on. This is not left vs. right. This is life vs. death. #MarchForOurLives #NeverAgain

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This opinion suggests that issues related to gun violence should not be viewed from a lens of dual-party citizenship. Rather, gun violence is an issue of life and death. By suggesting another angle to view the issue at hand, this user is demonstrating the importance of shifting the discussion from politics to public health. This shift in the discussion about guns has the ability to encourage political opportunity by bridging the gap between Republican and Democrat ideologies. Using nonpartisan terms can potentially rid sympathetic Republicans of the fear of party resistance, as well as encourage Democrats with pro-gun ideologies to speak out in ways to reduce gun violence without forcing discussion on outright gun bans.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine social movement behavior through social media following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting to understand how conflicting ideologies are presented and how social movements are mobilized through digital platforms. Is social media a useful tool in the mobilization process of a social movement? Or is social media simply an avenue for easy "slack" activity for individuals to pride themselves in being involved? How are differing ideologies of gun rights and gun control presented on social media websites such as Twitter? Can social media support or trigger enactment of social change? It is suggested that revolutionary movements in modernity will frequently include social media, and social media may often be needed, but more is needed than hashtags and tweets (Kidd and McIntosh 2016).

Overall, I found that discourse on Twitter which included the #MarchForOurLives hashtag was consistently separated on a bipartisan level. Gun control advocates using this hashtag frequently identified themselves as "liberal" or "Democrat" on their profiles. On the other hand, those advocating for gun rights often cited themselves as "conservative" or "Republican". Both sides of the bipartisan debate were guilty of fallacy, fearmongering, and political extremism by using unsupported facts or appeals to emotion or ignorance. I also found that social movement activity on Twitter endorses celebrity involvement in protests and demonstrations, while simultaneously acting as a space for sharing opinions.

The bipartisan ideologies associated with the #MarchForOurLives tweets thoroughly demonstrates Habermas' theory of the public sphere. Habermas (1989) held the ideology that laws and policies enacted by the government should be guided by the

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public sphere, or rational debate between the public. Although policy changes regarding gun control since the Parkland shooting may not be a direct result of Twitter activism, public debate on social media sparked a nation-wide conversation about common sense gun laws. Since the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas, there has been limited success with stricter gun laws in Florida and the introduction of a bill which would enforce strict background checks. There is no telling how much the activity on Twitter and other social media websites affected these changes in policy, but as Valenzuela (2013) suggests, social media use has a positive relationship with political involvement.

In my research, Twitter also appeared as a digital replica of the "coffee shop" public sphere noted by Habermas. It is true that as an industrialized society, the United States has become increasingly individualized. With the ability to share political opinions and debates on a public forum, I believe the public sphere may be transforming once again. The introduction of social media has both increased and continued to dilute activity within the public sphere. As individuals can enact in public discourse from the safety of their homes, behind the comfort of a screen, they are also more able to take part in irrational debate. As Habermas admits that rational discourse is required for the public sphere to function properly, social media appears to be flawed in providing the civic public needed to enact proper change.

Gross (2006) explains that systematically distorted communication undermines solidarity, which acts as "the basis of an authentic and democratically-forged national identity" (311). Habermas (1970) argued that systematically distorted communication distorts the mutual understanding in communication, therefore diminishing the goal of communicative action. When solidarity is undermined by distorted communication, we

can no longer form mutual understandings, as seen through tweets associated with #MarchForOurLives. Using profanity, attacks on character, and extreme claims against opposing beliefs through tweets makes Twitter a vehicle for distorted communication and irrational debate, thus limiting its' use as the public sphere which connects the world of systems and the lifeworld.

That being said, findings also demonstrate both a dissonance and familiarity with Emile Durkheim's (1912) collective conscience. While I had hoped to find a religious sentiment through totemism of firearms and ideals of sacred profane, these findings were absent in my research. Still, it was clear within this sample that shared beliefs, morals and values are exacerbated through social media. Gun control activists shared values and ideals, often including hashtags such as "#Resist" or "#TheBlueWave" to demonstrate their liberal or Democrat ideologies. Gun rights activists also shared values and sentiments through hashtags such as "#2A" or "#MAGA". In some ways, using the #2A hashtag represents a religious-like attachment to the second amendment and gun rights, similar to Durkheim's (1933) elementary forms of religious life. Both groups often used common strategies for debate, such as the emotional appeals and survivor stories of gun control ideologies or references to the Holocaust or pro-life sentiments of gun rights ideologies.

An argument can be made that online interactions do not support a social form of consciousness. Related to ideas of slacktivism and "fake" news introduced by previous research, it is possible that social media activity in the mobilization of the March for Our Lives movement is individualistic and self-oriented. Segre (2016) suggests that the considerations of cost and benefit for individual activity may be relevant for participation

in social movement activity. Therefore, even if the activity was guided by a self-serving motivation, contribution to the #MarchForOurLives hashtag provides an avenue for extending the accessibility of the collective conscience for both gun control and gun rights supporters.

Furthermore, social media appears to be a pivotal tool in the mobilization of modern-day social movements. Through a lens of Political Process Theory, I found that the March for Our Lives movement thrived on Twitter due to collective ideologies of a political opportunity for change. Although there was a presence of internet trolls and apparent slacktivism, it was clear that the mobilization of March for Our Lives was driven by a collective agreement that gun laws need to be changed to avoid future mass tragedies. This, however, was heavily influenced by fearmongering tactics from both gun control and gun rights activists.

It is true that many individuals are motivated to act through fear. Media sensationalism of mass gun violence has infiltrated America in recent years, increasing fears of risk. Users of Twitter, including the founders of March for Our Lives, are equally as guilty of inciting fear as the public press is when discussing mass shootings. The lack of a concise definition of mass shootings could easily be to blame, as misguided facts were frequently provided within my sample and in past research. Fearmongering tactics were easy to find throughout references to the #MarchForOurLives hashtag, demonstrating the prevalence of the American culture of fear. One side of the argument says children are unsafe if there are guns in circulation. The other side of the argument says we are unsafe if they are not. It appears that the one thing individuals in my sample did not want to discuss were external factors which contribute to mass gun violence, and

gun violence in general.

While my sample was inclusive only of those who referenced one specific gun control movement, there are different avenues of understanding the issue of gun violence debates on social media through less specific hashtags. It was not the aim of the research to look for discussion of external factors contributing to mass gun violence, but it appears to be the one thing missing from public discourse on Twitter. Future research should focus on debates regarding alternatives to gun control in reducing or ending mass shootings. If it is truly gun safety that we aim for, does that truly mean control and regulation? Or does that mean something entirely different? And how would this external factor be presented through discourse on social media? Additionally, future research should focus on the implementation of media spectacles and "fake" news to understand how they impact the mobilization or demobilization of a movement.

This current research is not without limitation. One limitation of this study is the data collection process. Because Twitter's API limits users' ability to scrape for historical data, I had to rely on a third-party site for my dataset. Although Crimson Hexagon has been cited in numerous studies involved with Twitter research, I cannot be certain of how randomized the sample was. However, I chose this avenue instead of the "scroll-through" method in order to eliminate personal biases. The "scroll-through" method would have required scrolling through tweets using Twitter's "advanced search" feature, and it is likely that I would have cherry-picked tweets which supported any opinions I already had. By using a third-party site accompanied with Google's random number generator, I was able to obtain a sample of 888 tweets without being hindered by personal biases.

Still, fear of personal bias was another limitation I faced in this research.

Although my data were collected randomly, I found it difficult to truly criticize any tweets provided by co-founders of the March for Our Lives movement. This was one of the most difficult parts of this research. How do you critique somebody who faced a tragedy such as this? How do you honor the victims and survivors of a mass shooting while staying true to your research goals? Regarding the time constraints placed on this research, I found it particularly difficult to remove personal biases from the equation.

Social media has become a driving force in the mobilization of social movement activity. Although social movements require real-life interaction as well, social media provides a platform that is open to a wide public. Future research should focus on the intersectionality of this access. This current study failed at finding significant social movement activity based on demographic features such as race, ethnicity, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Owing to the limitations to Twitter's API, I was unable to truly identify demographic information among my sample. If the user did not freely advertise their demographic information on their profile, I could not in good conscience make assumptions. Future research should work directly with Twitter, or any other social media website, to obtain this information fairly.

This research sheds light on the prevalence of social media in gun reform social movement activity. Social media has a clear influence on social movement activity, though digital networks are not the only driving force. This content analysis opens the door for future research to identify how social movements, specifically regarding gun policies in America, are mobilized and enacted on social media. This study contributes to the discipline of Sociology in areas of social movements, social media and the culture of fear.

Personal Reflection

The process of this research was particularly difficult, and I believe it is important to discuss the anxieties created through studying mass atrocities. Cullen (2018) discusses the prevalence of secondary post-traumatic stress in studying tragedies such as the Parkland shooting. He describes this as the emotional stress that one feels when hearing about or studying the first-hand traumatic experiences of another. Throughout this research, I came across emotional contributions from individuals who lost a loved one in a mass shooting. It was difficult and emotionally harrowing to read these tweets through an unbiased perspective. It was difficult to continue this research knowing I may offend or misrepresent somebody who has been affected by gun violence. Finally, it was difficult to randomly wake up in a fit of terror due to nightmares of being caught in the middle of such an atrocity. My heart goes out to the victims and survivors of the Parkland shooting.

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