

Youth and Activism, Expanded Materials

This is a collection of expanded materials for teaching about youth and activism. Here, we include a list of suggested readings on several topics that you may include in your syllabi, annotated articles with suggested discussion questions that are oriented toward thinking about youth activism, links to online materials including interviews with young people about politics, how to's for interviewing, and videos of social movements scholars discussing central findings in the field. In addition, we also include several one week modules for discussing youth in a political sociology, political communication, or social movements class.

Suggested readings

Annotated Readings

Online Materials

One Week modules

Potential movements for discussion

Focus questions

Short assignment: Perceptions of Politics Assignment

Seminar/Project Idea: Research Paper on Youth Activism

Suggested Readings:

Overview

Dalton, Russell. 2013. "Chapter 4: Who Participates?" p.63-86 in *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 6th Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press

Caren, Neal, Raj Andrew Ghoshal, and Vanesa Ribas. 2011. "A social movement generation: Cohort and period trends in protest attendance and petition signing." *American Sociological Review* 76.1: 125-151.

Campus

Van Dyke, Nella. 1998. "Hotbeds of activism: Locations of student protest." *Social Problems* 45.2: 205-220.

Munson, Ziad. 2010. "Mobilizing on campus: Conservative movements and today's college students." *Sociological Forum*. 25 (4): 769-786

Socialization

Lee, Nam-Jin, Dhavan V. Shah, and Jack M. McLeod. 2013. "Processes of political socialization: A communication mediation approach to youth civic engagement." *Communication Research* 40.5: 669-697.

Youth & Social Movement Organizations

McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to high-risk activism: The case of freedom summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92.1: 64-90.



Gordon, Hava Rachel. 2007. "Allies within and without: How adolescent activists conceptualize ageism and navigate adult power in youth social movements." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36.6: 631-668.

Intersectionality & Youth Activism

Velasquez, Alcides, and Robert LaRose. 2015. "Youth collective activism through social media: The role of collective efficacy." *New Media & Society* 17.6: 899-918.

Terriquez, Veronica. 2015. "Intersectional mobilization, social movement spillover, and queer youth leadership in the immigrant rights movement." *Social Problems* 62.3: 343-362.

Annotated Readings

McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer" *American Journal of Sociology*. 92(1): 64-90.

This article proposes a distinction between low risk (cost) and high-risk activism, and outlines who gets recruited to participate in the latter using the Freedom Summer campaign as a test case. McAdam argues that participation in high risk activism is driven by social connections—specifically the strength of one’s ties to activism (via personal or organizational contacts or activist participation) and their biographical availability—, and not strong individual beliefs. In order to show this, McAdam looks at the Freedom Summer campaign of 1964 where hundreds of northern college students went to Mississippi to help register black voters. To study participation, McAdam takes data from participants (1068 in total), and codes for participants (720), rejects (55), withdrawals (239), and those with unclear statuses (54), and compares across them to understand the differences. McAdam finds that motivations for participation between withdrawals and participants did not differ significantly, but they did differ in the number and types of organizations that they were a part of. McAdam also finds that participants with strong ties to other Freedom Summer participants or known activists were more likely to participate than those with weaker ties, and that those who had participated more in the past were more likely to participate. Lastly, McAdam finds evidence of what he calls “biographical availability” or that those with more time to engage and fewer personal responsibilities will be more likely to participate. Specifically, he finds that the youngest applicants were more likely to withdrawal in comparison to “older” mid-twenties applicants.

Questions:

1. What does McAdam mean by high risk and low risk activism? What are some additional examples that we can give for movements that are operating today?
2. What was the Freedom Summer campaign? What did the movement ask participants to do? Would you have gone?
3. How important were youth for the Freedom Summer campaign? Generally, how important do you think young people are for social movements?
4. McAdam finds some counter-intuitive findings for age. What does he find? Do you think that there is a “sweet spot” for high risk activism?



5. Are there examples of high risk activism that are currently happening? How do they shape who we think of as activists and protesters?
6. Is high risk activism enough for a movement to succeed?

Van Dyke, Nella. 1998. “Hotbeds of Activism: Locations of Student Protest”
Social Problems. 45(2): 205-220.

This paper explores why student protest occurred on some campuses during the 1960s, but not others. The article proposes that the cultural history of universities (i.e. the history of activism on campus) shapes where protests occur. Van Dyke argues that campus activism is due to longstanding activist subcultures that endure across generations (specifically clubs and organizations that keep activism going), the availability of resources (possibly acting as a proxy for students’ ability to take classes without working), as well as other factors like school size and selectivity. To show this, the author draws on data from 423 colleges and universities as the unit of analysis. 187 had student activism (measured as the presence of an Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) chapter (105 schools) or contributing Freedom Summer participants) (146 schools) between 1960 and 1965 (236 did not). Van Dyke finds that schools with a history of activism (in the 1930s), some degree of selectiveness, and large student populations are more likely to have activist organizations, and religiously affiliated schools are less likely to have student activism in the 1960s. Van Dyke also finds that the presence of SDS organizations prior to the summer of 1964 predicts participation in Freedom Summer, and Freedom Summer participation, in turn, predicted the founding of SDS chapters supporting the argument that campus cultures facilitate activism broadly.

Questions

1. How do Van Dyke’s findings about political culture fit with your school?
2. What do you think of Van Dyke’s argument that “long standing activist subcultures” contribute to activism on campus? Her work focuses on the 1960s, do these matter as much now that we have the internet and social media?
3. What do you know about the history of activism on your own campus? Are there any groups or locations that are associated with protest?
4. Van Dyke finds a symbiotic relationship between SDS and Freedom Summer participation. Is this unique, or do social movements on campus still “spillover” into one another?
5. In line with previous work in the area, Van Dyke finds that schools that are more selective are more likely to have activism. Why do you think that is the case?

Gordon, Hava. 2007. “Allies Within and Without: How Adolescent Activists Conceptualize Ageism and Navigate Adult Power in Youth Social Movements” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 36(6):631-668.

This article focuses on how young people experience and respond to ageism directed against them for their activism. The article argues that youth politicize the ageism they face, but they do so in different ways based on where they fit in race and class hierarchies, and these positions inform their organizational structures and mobilizing strategies. Gordon argues that “adolescence”—like race, class, and gender—is as much a socially constructed category as it is an immutable part of development, and has long been constructed as oppositional to adulthood. Indeed, treatment of youth



often emphasizes adult identities, value systems, and power at the expense of young people's lived experiences, and young activists must often develop ways to negotiate the ageist expectations of the social movement organizations they are a part of. To demonstrate this empirically, Gordon draws on qualitative analysis of two youth movement organizations between 2002 and 2004: the Coalition of Student Activists (CSA), a mostly white middle-class network of teenage activists in Portland OR, and United Youth (UY), a multiracial working class network of teens in Oakland CA. Gordon finds that the youth participants in UY saw ageism as a form of systematic oppression, and tried to emphasize youth empowerment with the support of adult allies, rather than youth autonomy from adult allies. In contrast, middle class CSA did not integrate adult allies, making its youth-centered mission particularly empowering for participants, but the lack of adult mentors also left members bereft of guidance and historical perspective when they faced obstacles and failures. In sum, Gordon argues that teenagers recognize, politicize, and criticize ageism and their social subordination as a result of living in an adult oriented society, and that young people's collective understandings of ageism guide their social movement tactics and organizational strategies.

Questions

1. What were the pros and cons of incorporating adult allies into youth activist organizations? Are the benefits worth the costs?
2. Are adult allies and connections to history particularly important for working class activists, activists of color, or poor activists of color?
3. Does ageism matter more or less for youth who are minority members of society in other ways (e.g., class, race, and gender)?
4. What role have adults played in the political and activist organizations you have been involved with?
5. For those who have never been active with a group, how would you perceive an activist group that was entirely run by youth?

Crossley, Alison Dahl. 2015. "Facebook Feminism: Social Media, Blogs, and New Technologies of Contemporary US Feminism." *Mobilization* 20(2): 253-268.

This article explores how online social and friendship networks shape social movements, and argues that Facebook and online blogs enlarge and nourish feminist networks, create online feminist communities, sustain solidarity, and expand recruitment bases for online and offline mobilization. Crossley argues that interpersonal networks are important for collective action, but there are questions about whether online communities are sufficient for establishing close enough ties for mobilization. Despite these concerns, it is increasingly difficult to research offline movements without considering their online dimensions (255). To demonstrate this, Crossley focuses on college students' feminist organizing and networking on Facebook and blogs. The author collected data on individuals and organizations at three different universities, and conducted in depth semi structured interviews with 75 undergraduate students (25 at each school). The author finds that respondents reported regularly visiting feminist blogs, and that these blogs aided in developing online communities and connecting activists across diverse geographic locations. Blogs offered information on feminism and feminist ideas, and helped to build offline relationships and connections. Crossley also finds that Facebook allows members to circulate substantive and personal information, and helps them to build solidarity with one another. It was also a medium for advertising to new members; in contrast to more traditional



paper flyers. Of course, Facebook also brought members into contact with adversarial people, but participants viewed this as an opportunity to share information and ideas. In sum, these online sources reinforced participants' commitment to feminist causes, and allowed them to express these beliefs to one another.

Questions

1. Do you follow activists or activist organizations on social media? How do they influence your beliefs and perceptions?
2. Can you think of other cases of online communities developing close ties and strong commitments? How do the activist organizations that Crossley describes compare?
3. What do you think of the benefits of online organizations that Crossley outlines? Had you thought of all of these before? Do they make online communities more important, or are they still the same?
4. Why do you think youth gravitate toward online activism?
5. Do you think negative perceptions of online activism have anything to do with adults associating it with youth? Why or why not?

Earl, Jennifer, Thomas V. Maher, and Thomas Elliott. 2017. "Youth, Activism, and Social Movements" *Sociology Compass*. 11(4)

This article synthesizes and summarizes the article on youth political socialization, campus activism, and rising issues related to youth activism including fan activism, online activism, and issues of race, gender, and intersectionality. The article addresses the role that college campuses play for fostering political activism, the broader political science and political communication literature on political socialization, the complex role that youth organizations play for fostering political activism, and how issues of race, gender, and intersectionality are particularly important for creating inclusive activist experiences. The article concludes by highlighting several areas where the authors anticipate the field will grow. Namely, through fan activism—the process of getting politically engaged through culture or media (like Harry Potter or soap operas) rather than a political issue—and the use of social media for activism. The authors contend that these are the areas where youth are most comfortable and most active, and, because youth will set the tone for political activism into the future, they will be crucial for understanding the future trajectory of activism.

Questions

1. Are perceptions of the lack of youth political socialization based on an actual lack of youth socialization or adults looking for forms of political activism that are familiar to them?
2. How does the intersection of age with more recognized forms of inequality (race, gender, and class) make it harder for youth activists to get recognition and respect for the issues they care about?
3. Do you think that tactical innovations developed by youth have more or less chance of having an impact? Why?
4. Have you ever experienced ageism? Have you ever experienced ageism in connection to your political beliefs and opinions?



5. Why would youth be more mindful of issues of race, gender, and intersectionality for activism? What do you think of the authors (and Gordon's) argument that age is an aspect of identity that should be considered alongside race, class, gender, and sexuality?
6. What are the advantages of fan activism and online activism? Have you ever participated in these actions? Do you think they will lead to street protest disappearing?

Online Materials:

Henry Jenkins – By Any Media Necessary:

<http://byanymedia.org/works/mapp/index>

This website is a companion to Jenkins' book of the same name. It offers articles that elaborate and exemplify concepts from the book. It also provides links to videos and examples of how youth have used culture and media to convey political ideas and issues. Finally, the website offers teaching and learning guides and conversation starters for instructors interested in incorporating these materials into the classroom.

Black Youth Project:

<https://blackyouthproject.com/category/video/>

The Black Youth Project is a platform for highlighting the voices of young black people and the issues that they are concerned about. The site offers a collection of news articles and videos that sit at the intersection of youth culture and black culture. The site is connected to the activist group BYP 100, and so it also acts as an opportunity for exploring the connection between an activism, information, and media.

Youth Radio:

<https://youthradio.org/>

Youth radio is an organization that helps get youth involved in telling their own stories. They have had stories shared on NPR and other media channels. The site offers tips and information for educators (including a wide range of "How To's" (including fact-checking, controlling online presence, getting great interviews, etc)). The site also includes links to a range of youth-created, youth-oriented journalism, and youth telling their own stories that can be used in several ways in the classroom.

Informing Activists:

<https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/2015/11/13/informing-activists/>

Informing activists is a website that has social movement scholars summarize areas of social movement research (like how to avoid burnout, how to get other people to participate, and how to choose your tactics) in ways that are understandable and accessible for youth who are just getting started.

One Week Modules

One week modules for courses on Youth & Society, Social Movements, and Political Sociology:

Youth & Society ~ Youth and Politics

Earl, Maher, and Elliott, 2017 (overview)



Lee, Shah, and McLeod, 2012 (Socialization and political participation)
Dalton, 2013 – “Who Participates” Ch. (overview of what participation looks like)
Munson, 2010 (how people become activists)

This module offers a week overview of interdisciplinary research on youth political engagement ranging from political talk to activism. Our Sociology Compass piece offers an overview of the literature focusing on youth participation in social movements, the role of campus for activism, how youth intersects with gender and race, and, finally, some insights into the future of the field. The other three articles offer more direct dives into these areas. Lee, Shah, and McLeod introduce the communication mediation approach to political communication, Dalton offers an overview of what youth participation looks like on a macro level, and Munson offers an excellent case based analysis of why college campuses are so fertile for activism that focuses on the idea of “transition points.”

Social Movements ~ Youth activism on campus

Earl, Maher, and Elliott, 2017 (overview)
Van Dyke, 1998 (where protest emerges, and why) ~ macro
Munson, 2010 (how people become activists) ~ micro
Velasquez & LaRose, 2014 (a new generation) ~ innovation/tactics

This module offers a week overview of social movement research that focuses specifically on youth and campus activism. Our Sociology Compass piece offers an overview of the literature focusing on youth participation in social movements, the role of campus for activism, how youth intersects with gender and race, and, finally, some insights into the future of the field. Van Dyke’s seminal articles offers a quantitative analysis of which campuses produce activism and why, and—in combination with Munson’s excellent case based analysis of why college campuses are so fertile for activism will prove insightful for discussing youth activism—as well as connecting with literature on political process theory, resources, and micromobilization more generally. Finally, Velasquez and LaRose offer an insightful approach that hints towards the use of more innovative tactics and frames (i.e. intersectionality) that build on prior campus activism.

Potential Movements for Discussion

#Black Lives Matter

Day, Elizabeth. 2015. “#BlackLivesMatter: the birth of a new civil rights movement” *The Guardian* July, 19. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement>

Harry Potter Alliance

<http://www.thehpalliance.org/>

Slack, Andrew. 2011. “Cultural Acupuncture and a Future for Social Change” *Huffpost Blog*. May, 25.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-slack/cultural-acupuncture-and_b_633824.html

ADAPT

<http://adapt.org/>



Darville, Jordan. 2017. "ADAPT Aren't Just Fighting Against Trumpcare, They're Fighting For Disabled Lives" *The Fader*. 7/21/17
<http://www.thefader.com/2017/07/21/adapt-trumpcare-interview-protest-legislation>

Occupy Wall Street

Vara, Vauhini. 2014. "The Occupy Movement Takes on Student Debt." *The New Yorker*. September, 17.
<http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/occupy-movement-takes-student-debt>

Strike-Debt

<http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/student-debt-revolt-begins>
<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2015/jul/21/occupy-wall-street-student-debt-education-new-orleans>

#SayHerName

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/may/30/sayhername-why-kimberle-crenshaw-is-fighting-for-forgotten-women>

Focus Questions

How does youth political engagement compare with overall political engagement?

What challenges do youth face as they begin to get politically involved, and how do they overcome them?

Why is college such a significant time for youth political activism? Do you see that changing as the role of college changes in society?

What issues have youth brought to greater public attention in the last five years? How have these issues been received by politicians, presidential candidates, and the news media?

Short Assignment: Perceptions of Politics Assignment

Assignment: Youth Political Participation Interview Study

Overview: In class we have discussed, or will be discussing, how youth learn to be politically involved, perceptions of youth political involvement (particularly adults' perceptions), and how youth may "avoid" being perceived as political. We have also discussed the realities around the diverse ways that youth are politically active. For this assignment, **I would like for you to conduct relatively short (15-20 minutes unless it gets interesting) one-on-one interviews with THREE people you know or perhaps do not know so well regarding such themes.** These can be friends, significant others, family members, neighbors, strangers, etc. Specifically, ask them the following questions. Also, make them feel comfortable as a sociologist might, and assure them that you want honest and open answers:

- What were you taught about politics and activism growing up from your family, friends, and teachers? Did you have conversations about political issues at home or with friends?



- Do you see yourself as politically active? What do you do that you would consider political? What would you consider activism?
- Why do you engage in these forms of politics and activism? [If they do not participate in any activism or politics, as them why they choose not to participate]?
- What do you think of politics in general? What do you think of people who are politically active? What would you think if someone referred to you as politically active or an activist?
- Who do you talk about politics with? What do you talk about, and how often?
- What sorts of issues do you think are worth getting active in response to?

After you have completed your interviews, you will write a **research report** on what you have found. Your report will be organized, have an introduction and conclusion, as well as a central conceptual focus. The body of the paper should be divided into several sections. With the exception of the introduction and conclusion, each should receive equal weight in your write-up:

1. An **Introductory** section that introduces the issue, broad research question, and a **conclusion** that summarized the main findings from your interviews and you analysis of them.
2. A **Description and summary** of your interviews. Describe who the THREE people you interviewed were, who they are to you, and when you interviewed them. Summarize their responses. What did you learn from them that you never thought about, or realized? What were the common themes and patterns of experiences that you saw across all of the interviews?
3. An **analysis and interpretation** of these observations using **some** of the concepts developed in the text and class. Integrate your interview materials with lecture and text pertaining to political socialization, political participation, and political avoidance. Overall, you should demonstrate an awareness of some of the varied ways that engage with or avoid political participation. Make sure that you are not only using some of the concepts you've learned in class, but that you are demonstrating that you understand and can apply them.

4. A **reflective discussion** about your own political socialization and participation. Have you ever thought about your political beliefs and actions? How did you learn “proper” political behavior, and do you express your political beliefs in culturally acceptable ways? Can you recall moments of ambiguity or tension, or peer pressure or policing, in your own development? Would you say that you generally conform your political beliefs to your friends and families’ beliefs or do you see yourself as challenging their political expectations? How and why?

Seminar/Project Idea: Research paper on Youth Activism

This seminar asks students to collect data on, and write about a youth social movement. There are four assignments that help to structure the project. The assigns are designed to help students with three of the major tasks associated with a long research paper: identifying a case, think about data that they can use to answer specific questions, identify relevant research, and combine these elements together into a final paper.

Assignment 1: Case proposal

Youth movements are movements that are focused on young people’s issues, where the majority of participants are young people, or where the movement organization is youth-directed. One of the first steps in any research project is the identification of case or data source for analysis. For this assignment, you will identify your case, explain how it is youth-oriented, identify one or two aspects of it that are interesting to you, and describe a two or three specific places that you know about for collecting data.

Assignment 2: Research Proposal

After selecting a case, the next step in the research process is to identify the data you will use to study the case, explain why it is relevant to your research question, and propose a timeline for conducting data analysis. This assignment is divided into two parts: (1) Case reiteration, and (2) Research proposal.

Assignment 3: Theory Proposal

After selecting a case and making methodological decisions, a researcher must investigate the existing data on their topic. For this assignment, you will restate your research topic and conceptual interest, and identify four academic journal articles. Two articles should focus how academic literature has treated the movement/issue you are interested in studying in previous work, and two articles should focus on the specific concepts you are interested in addressing in your paper. The goal of this assignment is to encourage you to start collecting and summarizing academic literature now in order to facilitate a better paper at the end of the semester.

Assignment 4: Research Paper

The final assignment for this course will be a research paper on one aspect of a youth movement or youth oriented movement. The paper includes several parts: an introduction to your case, an explanation of your methods, a description of your data as well as how you conducted your analysis, the results from your analysis, and a thorough engagement with one aspect of the social movement literature.

