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# THE TRANSFORMING ROLE OF IDENTITY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

## Revealing the Nature of Identity Construction Online and Offline during the March for Our Lives Movement

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## ABSTRACT

*The transformations arising from the Internet and social media have drawn the importance of forming a collective identity for social movements into question. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argue that the importance of collective identity in collective action does not apply to the logic of connective action, a more personal form of action that takes place on social media. Scholars continue to debate the relevance of collective identity and the applicability of connective action in today's social movements.*

*In this research, I investigate how the construction of collective identity and use of connective action in modern progressive social movements, specifically the March for Our Lives (MFOL) U.S. gun control movement in 2018, compares across online and offline discourse. The aim is to contribute to scholarship on the relevance of collective identity and connective action to modern social movements and reveal potential strategic insights for future social movement discourse.*

*I apply a combination of Khosravinik's (2018) social media critical discourse studies (SM-CDS) and Reisigl and Wodak's (2016) discourse-historical analysis (DHA) to examine collective identity construction and connective action on social media and in speeches. I analyze the production of meaning through discourse in the Foucault (2002) tradition, both in speeches and social media text following Treré's (2015) assertion that social media is a platform for discursive activity. I use Melucci's (1996) definition of the process of collective identity and Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) concept of connective action to guide my analysis.*

*The analysis reveals that discourse online and in speeches from MFOL constructed similar collective identities for the movement, suggesting that collective identity, even if diverse, could still be at the heart of social movements. Additionally, personal expression fitting the connective action concept arose not only on social media but in speeches, indicating that connective action is relevant alongside collective identity and is influencing traditional offline action. Finally, social media discourse revealed a peripheral identity that suggests a potential to shape the identification of outside supporters and potentially impact mobilization. Depending on the interpretation of MFOL's success or failure, these findings could inform future progressive social movements' discursive strategies surrounding collective identity and connective action.*

## INTRODUCTION

In social movement scholarship, the Internet and social media have spurred discussion around the continued importance of collective identity to motivate participation considering the emergence of more personal forms of action, or connective action, seen in online settings. Whether collective identity construction is relevant for modern social movements, and the role of connective action in movements' discourse, remain in debate. In this research project, I aim to increase understanding of how collective identity and connective action arise across online and offline discourse and their relevance in modern social movements using the case of the March for Our Lives movement.

The 2018 March for Our Lives (MFOL) pro-gun control movement provides an opportunity to examine the roles and interactions of collective and connective action in the discursive construction of collective identity within modern social movements. The MFOL movement meets the 'PICAR' ontology criteria of a social movement as defined by Cammaerts (2021). These five elements that constitute a social movement include a program, meaning an identified problem with a set of changes demanded, a collective identity, constructed based on an emotional appeal and a clearly defined enemy, and networks of connections (Cammaerts, 2021). Additionally, the elements include a repertoire of resistance and disruption actions as well as demonstrations of resolve, or a commitment to the cause over time (Cammaerts, 2021).

The debate over the right of American citizens to own guns stems from the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which activist groups interpret several different ways spanning from only an allowance for the existence of local regulated militia to a guarantee that citizens may own firearms (Dziobak, 2023). The federal government has instituted gun control legislation in the past, including the Gun Control Act of 1968, much of which the Firearm Owners Protection Act of 1986 reversed (Dziobak, 2023). The most significant federal gun control legislation was the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993, which implemented a five-day waiting period for a background check on the purchaser (Dziobak, 2023). However, two Supreme Court decisions in 2008 and 2010 reinforced the right for individuals to own guns (Dziobak, 2023).

The political debate over gun control remains a contentious topic in American politics. The case for increased gun control is built on the high rates of gun violence and mass shootings in the U.S. compared to countries with strict gun regulations. For example, in 2021, the U.S. gun death rate was 4.31 deaths per 100,000 people, compared to 0.57 in Canada and 0.013 in the United Kingdom, two countries with tight firearm restrictions (Aizenman, 2023). The same year saw over 630 mass shootings, or shootings when four or more people are killed, in the U.S. compared to one mass shooting in the United Kingdom that same year ('Euston shooting,' 2023; 'How many,' 2023). On the gun rights side of the debate, the argument often draws on the constitutional guarantees of personal freedom and the need for self-protection (Dziobak, 2023). The National Rifle Association (NRA) has become the major lobbying organization in support of access to weapons (Dziobak, 2023). The NRA, which holds vast financial resources, has successfully ensured that federal gun control legislation remains minimal (Queeney, 2021).

Gun control activism experienced a resurgence following the Parkland mass shooting. On February 14, 2018, Nikolas Cruz, a 19-year-old alumni of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) in Parkland, Florida, entered the school and murdered 17 people in less than seven minutes using an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle (Dziobak, 2023). Cruz had purchased the gun legally despite a history of behavioral issues and expulsion from the school (Spencer, 2018). After the mass shooting, MSD students and other gun control activists founded the March For Our Lives (MFOL) social movement to advocate for stricter gun control legislation on the state and federal levels (Dziobak, 2023). Cameron Kasky, a survivor of the attack, posted on social media with the hashtag #NeverAgain on February 15, kicking off the movement later named March For Our Lives (Dziobak, 2023). The movement quickly gained momentum on social media and student organizers began demonstrating and lobbying government officials within days of the shooting (Dziobak, 2023). Leadership then organized a march in Washington, D.C. on March 24 to rally support for increased gun control legislation and encourage young people to vote in the upcoming election (Dziobak, 2023).

Previous investigations into the success of gun rights activists have focused on the influence of money, specifically the NRA's financial resources, and the asymmetrical political engagement of gun rights supporters (Laschever & Meyer, 2021). Additionally, research on

the gun control debate relating to identity has focused on gun owner identity and how it connects to political engagement, but not on gun control activists and their identities (Jouet, 2019; Lacombe et al., 2019; Schwartz, 2021; Vidal et al., 2022). Research on the MFOL movement specifically has examined how participation in the movement impacted protesters' personal identities, but not how identities were created in the movement itself (Queeney, 2021).

In this project, I compare online and offline discourse in the MFOL movement to reveal the relevance of collective identity and the role of connective action. I deploy a combination of Khosravinik's (2018) social media critical discourse studies (SM-CDS) and Reisigl and Wodak's (2016) discourse-historical analysis (DHA) to compare the identity construction in movement discourse across online and traditional offline settings. In the literature review, I review the current debate over the relevance of collective identity in social movements, the emergence of connective action over collective action, and the impact of social media on movement discourse, followed by the conceptual framework that informs the study. The methodology chapter contains a rationale for the chosen discursive analysis method, details the research design and sampling strategies, and provides the analytical framework and reflexivity. Then, in the analysis and discussion chapter, I present the results of applying SM-CDS and DHA and what they reveal about the forms of collective identity constructed and the role of connective action in the MFOL movement discourse. The conclusion draws on the analytical findings to discuss potential future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I detail how the new social movement (NSM) and participant motivation turns in social movement theory led to the theorization of collective identity as an essential process in modern social movements. Then, I discuss the development of the collective identity concept including methods of creation and impacts on behavior. Following this background on social movement theory and the collective identity concept, I explain how the emergence of the Internet and social media led to a shift in social movement theory, particularly the emergence of the concept of connective action and the de-emphasis of collective identity. Finally, I trace the theorization of social media and social movements, including the debate

regarding whether and how discourse on social media impacts collective identity formation in social movements.

The idea of collective identity as an aspect of social movements emerged during the shift in social movement theory to NSM theory. This trend marked a turn away from the traditional conceptualization based on Marxist theory, recognizing that social movements in the 1970s and 1980s no longer appeared to be based in class conflict but instead were increasingly centered around identity, cultural values, and ways of living (Edwards, 2014). NSM theory reconceptualized the conflict at the root of these mobilizations. According to Habermas (1987), this shift in mobilizations arose as a reaction to the 'colonization of the lifeworld,' fighting over who people are and the ways they live. Touraine (1992), another early NSM scholar, theorizes that these movements represent a struggle over the production of culture. Melucci (1996), building on this theoretical turn, posits that new social movements are essentially about creating new collective identities.

Another turn in social movement theory at this time was to focus on how people are motivated to participate in collective action, rather than only why people are motivated. Unlike political process theory and resource mobilization theory, which theorized mass mobilization based on external political contexts and access to resources, respectively, Charles Tilly (1978) explores how people are motivated to partake in collective action. He theorizes that people's identifications with certain categories, whether class, religion, or otherwise, combined with network ties, were necessary for collective action (Tilly, 1978). Thus he introduced the idea of belonging to a category of people as a precursor to motivating participation in a movement.

The concept of 'collective identity' stems from Herbert Blumer's 'esprit de corps,' referring to shared feelings and identification within a group (Blumer, 1939). The idea gained popularity in the 1970s in relation to social movements (Milan, 2015). Melucci (1996) created a framework for studying collective identity as a process within social movements. In his work, he ventures to bridge the relationship between meanings in discourse and society and people's behavior, defining collective identity to explain how values and beliefs turn into motivation and action. Rather than a political process or resource mobilization perspective on motivation, he looks at how individuals and groups understand their actions through the process of collective identity

formation. Collective identity is a process wherein individuals construct and negotiate elements of action including the goals, means, and the field or realm of action (Melucci, 1996). The process works through a network of relationships between people communicating with and influencing each other (Melucci, 1996). Collective identity as a process also includes an emotional investment from participants, helping them feel they are part of the collective created (Melucci, 1996). This definition accounts for the dynamic properties of collective identity, the importance of defining 'others' in relation to the in-group, and the production of symbols and meanings in the process that actors can recognize and identify with or otherwise relate to (Melucci, 1996). The process of collective identity creates a bond between participants that enables individuals to make sense of their actions and affirm their participation in collective action as part of their membership in the group (Melucci, 1996).

Several theorists have contributed to investigating how collective identity impacts participant behavior in social movements. Gamson (1991) poses that creating a collective identity must be a central task for movements to create a sustained commitment to action. Hirsch (1986) and other scholars add that collective identity creates solidarity and emotional attachment to the movement (Goodwin et al., 2001; Milan, 2008). Others additionally argue that collective identity creates connectedness and 'relationships of trust' that help actors conduct collective action (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 94; Diani, 2006). Fominaya (2010) also claims that collective identity helps social movements maintain stamina over time.

Scholars have also conceptualized the functions by which collective identities are created. Johnston et al. (1994) hold that social movement participants create a collective identity through reflection on factors such as group boundaries and a shared vision. Hunt and Benford (2004) recognize the role of discourse as a tool for meaning-making and therefore collective identity construction in social movement communication. Cammaerts (2012) builds upon this idea, positing that distributing discourses is a means of constructing collective identity. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) similarly discuss how movements negotiate collective identities and disseminate collective action frames to mobilize people and create emotions.

The emergence of the Internet and social media, however, necessitated new theories on social movements based on new affordances (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The unique features of

social media offer several affordances, which boyd (2011) defines as opportunities for social movements to increase persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability. Treem and Leonardi (2013) build on this conceptualization of social media affordances, adding editability, association, and visibility as opportunities that social media provides for social movements. The new capabilities that social media affords social movements, as well as the new forms of social movement communication taking place on social media, brought forth new theorization of collective action on social media.

When organizing on social media, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) theorize, social movements use a logic of connective action, separate from the traditional logic of collective action. They explain that personalized forms of action in social movements have emerged due to societal changes including growing distrust of traditional political organizations, increased preference for personal paths to engagement, the apparent reduced effectiveness of traditional methods of mobilization, and the emergence of the Internet and social media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This type of action, which they call connective action, stems from inclusive and diverse personal expression rather than group affiliation.

Connective action arises from a logic that Bennett and Segerberg (2013) theorize is separate from the logic of collective action. The logic of collective action, which traditionally defined social movements, holds that incentives such as collective identity are necessary to outweigh the potential drawbacks of participating in collective action, including social disapproval (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). To prevent people from free-riding on the efforts of others, social movements need to motivate action through a sense of collective identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). In the logic of connective action, digital networks do not require a collective identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Instead, action is motivated by personal expression and involves online action that requires significantly less commitment than offline action and results in personal recognition and satisfaction (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This action is inclusive of people's individual identities, rather than constructive of a new one. Different forms of media, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argue, can act as platforms for both collective and connective action, however.

Although this new concept posits that today's social movements relying on social media can function without collective identity entirely, Milan (2015) disagrees and asserts that collective identity is still at the heart of modern movements. Kavada (2015) argues that connective action appears online, but may only be relevant to outsiders of a movement whereas the movement participants still function with a collective identity. Khazraee and Novak (2018) break from these distinctions and propose that online communications can create a collective identity, but a more personal and inclusive form of collective identity.

The relationship between social media and social movements has its own conceptual development that informs the process of collective identity on social media. Some scholars theorize social media as a platform that would bring more citizens into public debate and therefore promote democracy (Bimber et al., 2012; Chadwick, 2013; Langlois, 2011). Scholars have explored the potential opportunities that social media presents for social movement participation, including for more people to contribute to social movements in new forms, and for new ways to perform self-expression, catalyze collective action, mobilize quickly, and conduct meaning-making work (Bimber et al., 2012; Cardoso et al., 2013; Chadwick, 2013; Earl & Garrett, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2012; Kavada 2012; Milan 2015). Others take a political economy critique of social media, examining the ownership and algorithmic structures that limit user agency and enable corporate surveillance (Akrich, 1992; Fuchs, 2014; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Regardless of the nature of the opportunities presented, scholars recognize a cultural shift alongside the emergence of social media (Farman, 2012).

Based on the opportunities of social media for social movements, debate has emerged over the potential of social media to impact collective identity construction. From a discursive approach, following Foucault's (2002) idea that discourse simultaneously expresses and creates our social reality, collective identity is constructed through discourses and conversation (Cammaerts, 2012; Kavada, 2015). Gerbaudo and Treré (2015) cite several examples where social movement actors appear to form collective identity via social media. A school of thought claims that media are agents in identity construction, opening the door for social media as an agent in identity construction as well (Gamson, 1992; Mattoni, 2012). According to Milan (2015), social media acts as a vehicle or broker in creating meaning. She proposes the concept of 'cloud

protesting' to explain collective identity construction on social media. In cloud protesting, activists place together meanings incrementally, creating a flexible and inclusive identity, but still a collective identity. Social media also has agentic power on this collective identity formation, she contends, as algorithms and platforms set constraints on individual agency.

Other scholars, however, view social media as a forum only for shallow participation, or as unsuitable for collectives. Gladwell (2010) and Dean (2012) theorize that social media activity only consists of shallow participation that is not meaningful for social movements and does not have impact outside of the forums. Similarly, others claim that people taking part in social movement discourse on social media are only passive participants compared to those participating in offline action (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Valenzuela, 2013). Another group argues that social media is inherently unsuitable for collectives, instead only bringing together individuals and not forming a collective (Juris, 2012; Rainie & Wellman, 2014). Bennett and Segerberg (2013), as detailed above, contend that social media allowed for a new form of action for social movements, that of connective action, that no longer involves a collective identity and instead prioritizes personal expression.

Of the scholars that agree collective identity is relevant to social media movement discourse, they conceptualize how and in what form these identities emerge and shift on social media platforms. Milan's (2015) cloud protesting builds on Melucci's (1996) definition of collective identity as a process, which she explains occurs on social media through placing meanings together to create a collective that can transform over time. Kavada (2015) brings the idea of social media collective identity formation closer to Bennett and Segerberg's theory, explaining that social media makes collective identity inclusive and blurs the typical boundaries set in offline collective identity, forming a new kind that looks more like connective action. Who communicates with whom across what modes can vary in collective action, so a more fluid form of collective identity is still possible even if individual voices are more visible on social media (Kavada, 2015). Treré (2015), like Milan, sees social media as conducive to collective identity and categorizes its various functions in the process as reclaiming, proclaiming, and maintaining collective identity. Khazraee and Novak (2018) argue that social media creates two specific affordances for constructing collective identity: discourse and performance.

However, they contend that the identities created on social media are transient and can disappear quickly. Milan (2013) argues, however, that those identities can still appear quickly when reactivated by social media networks. Other theorists have added to conceptualizing this relationship between social media and collective identity, theorizing that hashtags help depersonalize engagement and therefore contribute to collective identity, but that the abundance of noise and negativity on social media could dilute movements (Lindgren, 2019; Ray et al., 2017).

The theoretical threads of social movements, collective identity, and social media have revealed gaps that warrant further research. The questions of whether collective identity is important in today's social movements, whether online discourse can produce collective identities or aligns with the concept of connective action, and whether and how offline and online identity formation interact in social movements remain under consideration. In this research, I use the case study of the U.S. gun control movement following the 2018 Parkland mass shooting to examine how connective action and collective identity construction compare across online and offline communication.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For this paper, I use Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) definitions of collective action and connective action to reveal the presence and relation of both in social movement discourses. They define the logic of collective action based on the tension between the gains and costs of participation in collective action, which creates a challenge for social movements to overcome the costs through motivating action based on collective identities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). They define collective action as a traditional form of social movement action that involves a group participating in a collective undertaking, to achieve a kind of public good, that relies on collective identity creation and has an emphasized role of organizations and leadership structures (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The logic of connective action, however, applies when contributions to a social movement are acts of personal expression, not requiring recognition of a collective identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Connective action, rather than collective

action, is self-motivated and consists of sharing personal ideas or actions using personal communication technologies such as social media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

I use Melucci's (1996) conception of collective identity as a process of meaning-making construction performed by social movements through communication. In this process, social movements define shared goals, tactics, and the field of action through a network of people formed by communication channels, technologies, organizational structures, and leadership (Melucci, 1996). Actors emotionally invest to identify as part of the collective (Melucci, 1996). Collective identity is then a fluid process, in which the meanings created are constantly negotiated through discourse but still act as a unifying force to enable collective action (Melucci, 1996). Another important part of this process is identifying outsiders of the group, or the adversaries of the group, as a basis for people to distinguish themselves from those not in the collective (Melucci, 1996).

I take the Foucault (2002) view of discourse as an act that creates meaning in society, that people use to simultaneously describe and create societal objects. Based on these definitions of discourse and collective identity, I take the view that discourse can create collective identities across many media of communication. Collective identity is constructed via discourse and conversation, across many modes of communication including from many to many and one to many, and in both private and public forums (Cammaerts, 2012; Hunt & Benford, 2004; Kavada, 2012; Kavada, 2015). Social media is viewed as a platform for discursive activity and therefore meaning-making (Treré, 2015). Additionally, I take the view of Monterde et al. (2015) that identities are shaped by networked interactions, which allow for the construction of identities through social media interactions, and Gerbaudo and Treré's (2015) contention that collective identities can be created via social media.

## Research Question

Based on this conceptual background, I venture to answer the following research question in this paper: *How does the construction of collective identity and the presence of connective action compare across online and offline discourse in modern progressive social movements, specifically the March for Our Lives pro-gun control movement in the U.S. in 2018?*

## METHODOLOGY

To answer this research question, I apply discourse analysis to a corpus of social media posts and speeches from the March for Our Lives movement to reveal the meanings created through discourse in test texts. In this section, I provide a justification for the use of discourse analysis and a combination of Khosravinik's (2018) social media critical discourse studies (SM-CDS) and Reisigl and Wodak's (2016) discourse-historical analysis (DHA), specifically. I then describe the sampling strategy and analytical framework applied, followed by a discussion of ethical considerations and methodological limitations in this project.

Discourse analysis is rooted in the ideas of constructivism, which holds that knowledge is constructed socially and that history and culture influence our accepted understandings of the social world (Gill, 2000). For this research that considers the meaning construction behind text, discourse analysis is appropriate to reveal the function of language in producing collective and personal identities. Foucault's theory of discourse provides a foundation for the method as it considers language to be one of the aspects of the world that builds our social reality (Foucault, 2002). In his theory, discourse is simultaneously shaped by and shapes knowledge, social contexts, and identities (Foucault, 2002). In this way, people can use language as a tool with the power to produce things in reality (Foucault, 2002). In the case of identities, discourse that represents a certain identity, in Foucault's view, creates the identity at the same time (Chouliaraki, 2008). This view of discourse as productive of social reality supports the research question's premise that language can construct identities and represent them simultaneously.

In addition to the view of language as not a neutral tool but a productive one, the methodology of discourse analysis views language as not only constructive but also constructed by actors who create and organize discourse strategically (Gill, 2000). Acknowledging that the authors of the discourse under analysis are intentional in their word and structure choices enables researchers to connect language to rhetorical strategies. For this research question, addressing text under this framework allows for situating the authors' language choices within strategies of creating collective or personal identities and further within overall collective and connective action strategies.

Discourse analysis, particularly in the critical tradition, also considers context when analyzing discourse meaning (Gill, 2000). Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as developed by Chouliaraki (2008) and Fairclough (2013), focuses on the intersection of language and politics, specifically (Gill, 2000). Both theorists add a normative element to discourse analysis and analyze how discourse relates to social issues (Fairclough, 2013). This contextual focus is relevant when analyzing text in a social movement that is primarily concerned with social issues and tied to decades of historical context.

To answer this research question, discourse analysis as a method presents advantages and disadvantages. By taking a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach, the method enables an in-depth analysis of meaning within the text (Fairclough, 2013). Qualitative discourse analysis considers implicit and explicit meanings in the text, ideological ideas that emerge, and how the text accomplishes social actions (Fairclough, 2013; Tovares, 2022). As the conceptual framework of this research theorizes identity construction as a social action accomplished through language, this qualitative textual analysis is ideal for investigating identity construction to answer the research question. Unlike a quantitative method such as content analysis that reveals numerical patterns across texts, discourse analysis allows for deeper engagement with ideas in the content that are not easily transformed into quantifiable codes, and can reveal ideas behind the text such as identities (Kuhn & Simpson, 2020; Vásquez, 2022).

Given resource restraints, however, discourse analysis is only applicable to a small sample of data, while quantitative methods can examine patterns across large databases. The research is restricted to findings within a few text samples and cannot reveal generalizable findings to a population, as survey methods could (Gill, 2000). However, discourse analysis can reveal insights in texts related to their specific context, making it optimal for examining a particular protest movement at a specific time as this research intends to do (Gill, 2000). Discourse analysis does enable researchers creativity in their textual interpretations, which can aid in revealing meanings hidden within the text, but also makes replicability difficult due to the more subjective analysis (Tovares, 2022). Practitioners of the method do acknowledge, however, that discourse analysis findings represent only one of multiple possible interpretations (Gill, 2000).

Several discourse analysis approaches could reveal processes of identity construction and instances of connective action in this research. Fairclough (2013) and Chouliaraki's (2008) approaches to CDA account for the power of discourse in creating personal and collective identities, including context and a focus on social change. However, Khosravinik's (2018) social media critical discourse studies (SM-CDS) and Reisigl and Wodak's (2016) discourse-historical analysis (DHA) are particularly appropriate for this research as they combine to form an approach that enables cross-analysis between social media and other texts as well as identity-specific analytical tools ideal for answering the research question. In SM-CDS, Khosravinik (2018) posits that although the context of the medium is important, discourse can be analyzed in comparison independent of the medium (Khosravinik & Sarkhoh, 2017). This handling of text is essential to compare discourse across social media and public speeches as the research question demands. DHA brings in categories of coding that make it ideal for analyzing identity formation while accounting for context. The DHA approach to coding enables researchers to search for referential, predicational, argumentation, and intensification or mitigation strategies (Khosravinik & Sarkhoh, 2017). Referential and predicational strategies refer to how things are named and characterized in the text, including groups or individuals (Khosravinik & Sarkhoh, 2017). Argumentation and intensification/mitigation strategies refer to the rhetorical strategies and ideology-based arguments that are employed in the text, giving broader context to the function of the identities created in the discourse (Khosravinik & Sarkhoh, 2017). DHA also involves accounting for any relevant historical context in the textual analysis. Combining these two approaches enables comparing social media texts with speeches from the MFOL movement for how the authors name and characterize individuals and groups and use rhetorical strategies to create discourses in the context of this specific social movement.

## Sampling

For this research, I created a corpus of data including five days of posts, which were known as 'Tweets' at the time of posting and which I hereafter refer to as 'Tweets,' on the platform X, which was known as 'Twitter' during this time frame under analysis and which I hereafter refer to as 'Twitter.' The corpus also includes five speeches from the March for Our Lives

protest on March 24, 2018. I collected Tweets from five days directly after the inciting incident, the MSD high school mass shooting on February 14, 2018. I chose to review Tweets due to the mass use of Twitter during this movement and the platform's role as a place where connective action can occur according to Bennett and Segerberg (2013; Einwohner & Rochford, 2019). Scholars have also found that activists have used Twitter as a tool, and discourse on the platform has played a role in movement agenda-setting (Moscato, 2016; Prendergast & Quinn, 2021). I selected speeches given by five self-identified members of the social movement's leadership to represent discourse disseminated by movement leaders in a traditional collective action setting.

To find the Twitter data for this research, I used Twitter's search function to restrict the Tweets collected to those using the #NeverAgain hashtag, the first hashtag that appeared following the mass shooting aggregating messages in favor of gun control policies. I narrowed the time frame to the five days after the event, February 15 to 20, 2018, to capture a period of intensified social movement discourse construction following the cycle of protest theory (della Porta, 2022). Given that hashtags set parameters for discourse on Twitter, I used #NeverAgain as a tool to collect Tweets intended to contribute to social movement discourse (Moscato, 2016). From this corpus, I removed Tweets from journalists, news organizations, and politicians, and excluded those Tweets that were apparently critical of the gun control movement in order to focus on posts that were examples of connective or collective action within the social movement. This exclusion intended to remove posts that were not part of the movement's discourse construction (Moscato, 2016). Finally, I narrowed the set to include Tweets with more than 100 'likes and 100 'retweets' to indicate that they received sizable reactions showing a form of consensus and were more likely to impact the social movement's discourses (Prendergast & Quinn, 2021). This sampling produced 134 Tweets for analysis.

## Analytical Framework

I adopted a combination of SM-CDS and DHA as the analytical framework for this research. I first reviewed each text in the corpus for common themes to familiarize myself with their content. Then, following the definitions of Reisigl and Wodak (2016), I coded each text separately for referential, predicational, argumentation, and intensification or mitigation

strategies. In this framework, referential strategies are how the author names and refers to people, groups, events, or other relevant phenomena (Reisigl, 2018). Predicational strategies are how the author describes these people, groups, or other phenomena, including characteristics and qualities (Reisigl, 2018). Argumentation refers to the author's use of arguments or argumentative strategies such as excluding or including details meant to convince the audience. Intensification and mitigation strategies include rhetorical devices or disclaimers that add or detract emotional emphasis from the text (Reisigl, 2018). Finally, I reviewed the corpus from a historical and contextual lens, following Reisigl & Wodak's methodology (Reisigl, 2018).

I piloted this methodology in a discourse analysis of Tweets and speeches from the Women's March on Washington movement in 2017. I collected Tweets with the hashtag #WomensMarch from the day of the march, January 21, 2017, and two speech transcripts delivered by leadership at the march. I read each speech and the database of Tweets collected several times through the lens of DHA, searching for examples of each category and accounting for contextual connections, and took notes on each coding category to compare across texts. I reviewed each speech four times, each time highlighting instances of the strategies and noting their functions. The pilot illuminated the need for a two-step analysis, reviewing the texts for common themes and then applying the DHA framework in-depth with general notions of what similarities and differences may arise from the analysis.

### Ethical Considerations & Methodological Limitations

To ensure the data was collected in an ethically sound manner, I copied the text and screenshots of any images or video content into a spreadsheet file saved only on a secure server. I did not include any identifying information that would make each Tweet easily searchable, such as the Twitter user's handle, time of post, or number of likes and retweets. Since the speeches were given by public figures in a public setting, they are part of the public domain and did not require anonymization.

My personal experience with the U.S. gun control movement may have influenced my ability to be objective in analyzing these texts. I was familiar with the movement's aims and messages

before undertaking this research. I practiced self-reflexivity in my selection of Twitter data based on time frame and engagement numbers and exclusion based on the political or journalistic status of the author. I also anonymized the data before undertaking my analysis. During the analysis, I made an earnest effort to use only the SM-CDS and DHA framework and not any previous assumptions I may have about the social movement's discourses.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Findings from conducting a combination of DHA and SM-CDS discursive analysis on the five speeches and Tweets revealed patterns in collective identity formation and connective action in the MFOL movement in 2018.

### Collective Identity Formation

Across the Tweets and speeches, discursive analysis revealed similarities in enemy identification and characterization of the in-group. These two activities, defining the enemy and the collective, are elemental parts of the process of collective identity formation according to Melucci (1996). Comparing how the text identified enemies to the movement unearthed similar characterizations of the enemy group. Overall, the enemy was characterized as corrupt and cowardly. Predication examples in various Tweets included references to corruption, such as '#NRABloodMoney,' '@realDonaldTrump must stop taking blood money from the NRA,' and 'Let's shame them into returning their blood money,' creating the narrative that the enemy chooses corruption over children's lives. The Tweets examined also included references to cowardice, including 'He can deflect the blame all he wants, but we all know what the truth is' and '@GOP legislators beholden to the @NRA in the Florida House voted down a motion to vote on an assault weapons ban.' These statements imply that the enemy is hiding from blame and unwilling to stand up in favor of gun control, representing that the enemy is cowardly.

Similarly, the five speeches include examples of characterizing the enemy as corrupt, cowardly, and as failures. In David Hogg's speech, he referenced corruption several times as seen in the sentences, 'The cold grasp of corruption shackles the District of Columbia' and 'When politicians say that your voice doesn't matter because the NRA owns them, we say no more'

(March For Our Lives, 2018a). He accuses the enemy groups of being governed by corruption. Delaney Tarr similarly referenced corruption in the middle of her speech,

> *They want our voices to be silenced. And they want to retreat into the shadows where they can remain unnoticed. They want to be back on top, unquestioned in their corruption (March For Our Lives, 2018b).*

David Hogg also characterizes the enemy as cowardly with the statements, 'They've gotten used to being protective of their position, the safety of inaction' and 'most representatives have no public stance on guns' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). These claims imply that the enemy is unwilling to act on behalf of gun control due to fear of losing their positions. X González similarly implied that the enemy refuses to look at the truth with the statement, 'For those who still can't comprehend, because they refuse to, I'll tell you where it went' (March For Our Lives, 2018c). Delaney Tarr also pulls on the idea of the enemy refusing to listen to the movement with the sentence, 'If they continue to ignore us, to only pretend to listen, then we will take action where it counts' (March For Our Lives, 2018b). Thus the enemy is represented as corrupt and cowardly by both movement leadership and participants on social media.

In addition to the characteristics assigned, the Tweets and speeches share similar identifications of the enemy, including President Trump, the NRA, Republicans, leaders in general, and specific politicians. Several Tweets referred to President Trump, including replies to his Tweets such as 'it's disgusting that you used it as a photo op' and 'But you're right, it always has to be about you.' Others included the Republican party and the NRA, as shown in the statements, 'And the truth is this - @realDonaldTrump @GOP @NRA among others have blood on their hands!' 'Let's make #NRA support the kiss of death for a campaign,' 'You take N.R.A. money, we'll vote you out,' '@realDonaldTrump must stop taking blood money from the NRA,' and 'It's criminal con-man Trump, Russia, Republicans and domestic terrorist NRA against the people of the United States of America.' Some Tweets also called out specific politicians besides the president, such as in the phrase 'when people like @marcorubio and @SpeakerRyan won't.' Several Tweets also referred to the general idea of leaders, such as in the statements 'when you're failed from above, lead from below' and 'I am so sorry leaders have failed you.' These Tweets contribute to the identification of a shared enemy to the

movement in the NRA, the president, and the Republican party, as well as leadership in general.

The speeches also identified the NRA, President Trump, Republicans, and leadership as the enemy, although the statements were more general than in the Tweets overall. There were fewer mentions of President Trump specifically, but Delaney Tarr did refer to him indirectly through the statement, 'When they give us that inch, that bump stock ban, we will take a mile' (March For Our Lives, 2018b). Taking into account the context of the speech, she was referring to President Trump's proposed bump stock ban, a ban on devices that increase the lethality of weapons, as a solution following the Parkland mass shooting. The speeches did refer to the NRA several times. Delaney Tarr mentioned them in the sentence, 'If we move on, the NRA and those against us will win' (March For Our Lives, 2018b). David Hogg similarly identified them as an enemy in the statements, 'When politicians say that your voice doesn't matter because the NRA owns them, we say no more' and 'And to those politicians supported by the NRA that allow the continued slaughter of our children and our future, I say get your resumes ready' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). He also identified a specific Republican politician, Marco Rubio, who was also identified in a Tweet, in the sentence, 'First off I'm going to start off by putting this price tag right here as a reminder for you guys to know how much Marco Rubio took for every student's life in Florida, $1.05' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). There were many more references to leaders and politicians in general as the enemy. Edna Chávez spoke directly to politicians in general in the statements 'Policymakers, listen up' and 'It's important to work with people that are impacted by these issues—the people you represent' (March For Our Lives, 2018e). She implied that the politicians are standing in the way of gun control, and are the target of the movement's protests. Delaney Tarr similarly referred to politicians in her speech,

> *We are here to call out every single politician, to force them into enacting this legislation, to addressing this legislation, to doing more than a simple Band-Aid on a broken bone. The pressure is on for every person in power, and it will stay that way (March For Our Lives, 2018b).*

David Hogg also called politicians the enemy in the statements, 'If you listen real close, you can hear the people in power shaking' and 'We're going to make sure the best people get in

our elections to run not as politicians but as Americans' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). Overall, the Tweets and speeches identified the NRA, Trump, Republican politicians, and politicians or leaders in general as the enemy, but the Tweets were more specific in mentioning Republicans or specific leaders more often, and the speeches referred to the general more often than they named specific politicians or the Republican party.

The Tweets and speeches also focused on similar representations of the collective. The identities and traits assigned to the collective across Twitter and the speeches included the collective as Americans or the nation, as brave, persistent, and capable, as young people or students who will be future leaders, and as people motivated by honoring the victims of gun violence. On Twitter, examples of this include the statements, 'The nation is sick of seeing mass shooting after mass shooting and hopefully this will show people that we are serious' and 'it's the politicians that MUST listen to the SCREAMS of the children and the nation.' Similarly, David Hogg's speech included several references to the collective as Americans, including the section of his speech,

> *Now is the time to come together not as Democrats, not as Republicans, but as Americans. Americans of the same flesh and blood that care about one thing and one thing only, and that's the future of the country and the children that are going to lead it (March For Our Lives, 2018a).*

Additionally, he categorizes the collective as Americans in the statement,

> *Because without the persistent heat, without the persistence of voters and Americans everywhere getting out to every election, democracy will not flourish, but it can, and it will (March For Our Lives, 2018a).*

These examples not only represent the collective as 'Americans' or the 'nation,' but they imply a difference between partisan politicians and Americans who support gun control.

The collective is also represented as persistent, brave, and capable of making an impact on Twitter and in the speeches. In Tweets, several statements refer to the movement as brave and resilient, including the phrases, 'the people who are currently exemplifying courageous, principled American leadership,' 'We won't let our school and the lives lost become a statistic through just thoughts and prayers,' and 'To those who are attacking these young advocates,

you are wasting your time. They have mobilized, they are brilliant and they won't be stopped.' These characterizations all imply that the movement is determined and brave in the face of opposition. Additionally, the Tweets represent the movement as capable of creating change in the statements, 'we are serious about making a change,' 'My school will rise and make a damn change,' and 'Change is coming and it is coming now thanks to all the wonderful people fighting the good fight.' The use of the word 'change' implies that those organizing can change the status quo and are not protesting in vain. Similarly, speeches referred to both the persistence and bravery of the movement and its ability to impact policy. In Edna Chávez's speech, she refers to the movement as empowered and unstoppable in her statement,

> *We need to focus on changing the conditions that foster violence and trauma. And that's how we will transform our communities and uplift our voices. This has not, and shall not, stop us. It has only empowered us (March For Our Lives, 2018e).*

David Hogg also emphasizes the ideas of persistence in his sentences, 'We will not stop' and 'without the persistence of voters and Americans everywhere getting out to every election, democracy will not flourish, but it can, and it will' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). Delaney Tarr repeats the idea of determination in her statements, 'This is a movement reliant on the persistence and passion of its people. We cannot move on,' 'Today, and every day, we will continue to fight for those things that are right. We will continue to fight for common sense,' and 'There will be no faltering, no pauses in our cause. Every moment will be dedicated to those pieces of legislation — every march, every meeting, every moment' (March For Our Lives, 2018b). These speeches also refer to the movement as capable of change, including David Hogg's statements, 'We can, and we will change the world' and 'We will come together. We will get rid of these public servants that only serve the gun lobby. And we will save lives! You are those heroes' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). Similarly, Edna Chávez included the sentence, 'Remember us and how we're making a change' (March For Our Lives, 2018e). These statements work together to create the image of a movement that is determined to continue working for gun control and can make a change through its efforts.

There is also a focus on inspirational youth and student leadership present in both Tweets and speeches. Statements on Twitter included 'we are your future doctors; lawyers; writers;

politicians; accountants; artists; entrepreneurs; dancers; managers,' 'These kids are going to make it happen!' and 'Inspirational students, activists & survivors from Douglas High rally at the federal courthouse in broward for #GunReformNOW.' Words such as 'kids,' 'future,' and 'students' emphasize the youth of the protesters. Additionally, statements characterized them as young leaders, including, 'So deeply impressed by the leadership students are showing in launching #NEVERAGAIN' and 'Notice it is the students at #Parkland who started the #NeverAgain movement, are viral in pressuring politicians, are organizing Nat'l School Walk Out Days.' The focus on the students leading the movement represents the movement overall as young and indicative of the future of the country. Similarly, the speeches focused on characterizing themselves as students and the movement overall as composed of young leaders. Zion Kelly began his speech with the sentence, 'My name is Zion Kelly and I am a senior at Thurgood Marshall Academy here in Washington, D.C.' characterizing himself as firstly a student (March For Our Lives, 2018d). Delaney Tarr began her speech the same way with the statement, 'My name is Delaney Tarr, and I'm here today because I'm a Marjory Stoneman Douglas student' (March For Our Lives, 2018b). David Hogg also focused on the analogy of the dawn of spring, comparing the movement to a brighter future with the statements, 'Change is here. The sun shines on a new day,' 'Today is the beginning of spring. And tomorrow is the beginning of democracy,' and 'This is the start of the spring and the blossoming of our democracy' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). These representations of the movement on Twitter and in the speeches focus on identities as students and youth, and embodying the future.

Finally, the representations of the movement share an idea of the organizers as honoring the gun violence victims. On Twitter, statements with this sentiment included, 'To the 17 innocent lives that were taken away #NeverAgain,' 'WE WILL grant them solace. WE WILL make a change. Do it for them,' and

> *For Alyssa. For Martin. For Jamie. For Luke. For Nicholas. For Cara. For Gina. For Joaquin. For Alaina. For Meadow. For Alex. For Helena. For Carmen. For Peter. For Scott. For Feis. For Hix.*

Similar sentiments were shared in speeches including from Delaney Tarr, stating,

> *I'm here on this stage today and I've been working everyday for my 17 fellow Eagles who were pronounced dead because of gunfire (March For Our Lives, 2018b),*

from Zion Kelly, stating, 'Today, I raise my hand in honor of my twin brother, Zaire Kelly' (March For Our Lives, 2018d), and from Edna Chávez, stating,

> *I am here to honor the Florida students that lost their lives and to stand with the Parkland students. I am here, today, to honor Ricardo. I am here today to honor Stephon Clark (March For Our Lives, 2018e).*

These statements represent a shared meaning on Twitter and in speeches for the movement that the collective is motivated by a shared interest in honoring the victims of gun violence.

The similarities in the collective identity formation in the discursive construction of the collective and shared enemy according to Melucci's (1996) process across Twitter and the speeches imply that social movement discourse on social media can contribute to overall movement collective identity creation and that online and offline discourse can influence each other. This finding aligns with Milan's (2015) view that collective identity is still a central part of collective action even when much of the movement discourse occurs on social media. The similar identity elements presented in the findings demonstrate that a traditional form of collective identity can be created across social media and traditional collective action settings, which does not necessarily confirm Kavada's (2015) idea that social media blurs the boundaries of the collective and makes collective identity more inclusive. The various similarities between collective identity formation on Twitter and in the speeches align closer to Milan's (2015) view of collective identity today instead of Kavada's (2015) inclusive approach.

However, there are also examples of diverse collectives identified across Twitter and the speeches that align with Fominaya's (2010) assertion that collective identities can be multiple and diverse. There are several examples of statements across both sets of data that refer to a diverse array of identities, including those of the local community, heritage, specific student groups, or more inclusive identities. For example, in Edna Chávez's speech, she begins with the statement, 'Hola, buenas tardes. My name is Edna Lizbeth Chávez, and I am from South Los Angeles, California, el sur de Los Ángeles,' emphasizing her identity as Latina (March For

Our Lives, 2018e). Then, her statement 'For decades, my community of South Los Angeles has become accustomed to this violence' focuses on her local community (March For Our Lives, 2018e). Similarly, Zion Kelly focuses on his local community throughout his speech. For example, he includes the sentences, 'This school year alone, my school lost two students to senseless gun violence, Paris Brown and my brother, Zaire Kelly' and 'This amendment means that every student in Washington, D.C. would carry the protection of my brother's name, ensuring safety as they travel to and from school in our city' (March For Our Lives, 2018d). Both of these sentences focus on his school, and the students in his city, rather than a focus on students overall or the whole country. X González identifies the collective as those who experienced the Parkland mass shooting:

> *In a little over six minutes, 17 of our friends were taken from us, 15 were injured, and everyone, absolutely everyone in the Douglas community was forever altered. Everyone who was there understands. Everyone who has been touched by the cold grip of gun violence understands. For us, long, tearful, chaotic hours in the scorching afternoon sun were spent not knowing (March For Our Lives, 2018c).*

In this section of her speech, 'us' refers to the people who experienced the shooting. In these cases, the speakers identify with multiple separate identities that differ from the other collective identity discourses elaborated above.

This kind of diverse group identification took place on Twitter as well. Several Tweets referred to the local community or specific high school students rather than a general movement, including:

> *I'm so incredibly proud to be a part of not only the Douglas and Broward community, but of this generation that's willing to unite for change in times of such devastation. We won't let our school and the lives lost become a statistic*

Other examples of these specific references are the statements, 'Marjory Stoneman Douglas students will not stop until action is taken,' 'Inspirational students, activists & survivors from Douglas High rally at the federal courthouse in broward,' and '100 MSD students taking on our state capitol. We mean business.' These examples show how both on Twitter and in

speeches, the text often referred to a more exclusive community with tighter boundaries such as a local high school, city or community, or heritage group. These examples align with Fominaya's (2010) idea of collective identity as multiple and diverse, showing that multiple identities can be part of a movement's overall collective identity. This could also align with Kavada's (2015) theory of social media blurring the boundaries of collective identity. However, since the examples of diverse identity occurred on both social media and in traditional speeches, social media cannot be confirmed as the cause of a more blurred identity. The findings do imply, however, that even though multiple forms of identity can occur in the movement discourse, they do not necessarily take away from the similar characteristics created in Melucci's (1996) collective identity process, which still results in similar collective and shared enemy creation across social media and traditional speeches. The formation of a collective appears to still be a major part of movement discourse for the U.S. gun control movement in 2018, supporting Milan's (2015) assertion that collective identity is still crucial for modern social movements.

### Connective Action Across Mediums

Another key finding in the analysis of this data corpus is the presence of connective action discourse as theorized by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) in both traditional collective action mediums, specifically speeches, and social media. Both mediums included several examples of personal expression, a key element of connective action. For example, one Tweet included the statement, 'I am working with the #NeverAgain and March For Our Lives movement to try to make a change!' This sentence represents the personal motivations behind the personal decision to support the movement. Similar statements included, 'I am working with the #NeverAgain movement to bring change to my state, my country, and the world' and 'I just emailed my senator and you should too!' These statements focus on the author's personal motivation and actions, representing the personal expression of connective action. Other Tweets included mentions of personal emotions and experiences, such as

> *#NeverAgain in sixth grade, i made paper snowflakes and wrote messages on them for the children of sandy hook. today, in 11th grade, i am left traumatized.*

Similar statements included, 'It leaves me speechless to know how easy it is here for a 19 year old to legally purchase an assault rifle,' 'Today, I had to mourn the loss of TWO of my friends at each of their funerals,' and 'My experience on that terrifying day is different- words cannot begin to describe how I feel, but this is a start.' These statements represent personal emotions with the words 'traumatized,' 'speechless,' and 'terrifying,' and share personal experiences of attending funerals, experiencing a mass shooting, and memories of previous school shootings, implying a desire to share a personal experience, the motivation behind the logic of connective action.

While examples of connective action statements on social media are expected under Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) theorization, the discursive analysis also revealed several examples of connective action rhetoric in the speeches. David Hogg began his speech with the sentence, 'First off I'm going to start off by putting this price tag right here as a reminder for you guys to know how much Marco Rubio took for every student's life in Florida, $1.05' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). This statement calls on his personal experience as a Parkland survivor. Additionally, he includes 'I' statements mixed in with a collective 'we,' such as in the sentence, 'I say to those politicians, I say change will not come' (March For Our Lives, 2018a). This represents his personal opinions and statements, put forward through personal expression. At the beginning of Delaney Tarr's speech, she discussed her personal experience and motivations:

> *My name is Delaney Tarr, and I'm here today because I'm a Marjory Stoneman Douglas student. However, I'm not here today for the media. I'm not here for the crowds, as great as you all are, for the fame, or for the fun. I'm here on this stage today and I've been working everyday for my 17 fellow Eagles who were pronounced dead because of gunfire (March For Our Lives, 2018b).*

These statements are a personal expression of her own experience and motivation for participating in the movement, tying to connective action discourses. She followed with the statement:

> *I am here for every person that has died at the hands of gun violence and for the many more whose lives were irreparably changed because of it. I think, I hope that that is why we are all here.*

In this section, she moves from the personal 'I' statement to a collective 'we' statement, bridging between personal expression and collective identity.

In Zion Kelly and Edna Chávez's speeches, the authors focus even more on personal experiences. Zion Kelly recounted his experience of his brother's death:

> *That night on September 20th, a robber with a gun was lurking on my streets for hours. On my walk home he attempted to rob me but I ran. Though he had an ankle monitor on, and he was supposed to be monitored by the police, he was still able to obtain a gun illegally and lurk in my streets and take my brother's life. He shot my brother in the head. Once he arrived at the hospital he was pronounced dead (March For Our Lives, 2018d).*

In this passage, he shares a personal experience, an example of the personal expression of connective action. Similarly, Edna Chávez shared the story of her brother's death:

> *I lost more than my brother that day. I lost my hero. I also lost my mother, my sister and myself to that trauma and that anxiety (March For Our Lives, 2018e).*

In addition to her personal experience of losing a loved one to gun violence, she also shared the impact of gun violence on her childhood overall in the statement:

> *I have lived in South L.A. my entire life and have lost many loved ones to gun violence. This is normal, normal to the point that I have learned to duck from bullets before I learned how to read (March For Our Lives, 2018e).*

Both speakers illustrate the impact of gun violence through personal experience, contributing to the movement discourse with personal expression that aligns with Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) connective action.

These findings align with Bennett and Segerberg (2013) that modern social movements can be more about personal expression, featuring connective action discourses. However, the presence of collective identity formation on social media and in speech discourse implies that although connective action is present, traditional features of collective action are still relevant. Additionally, finding connective action examples in speeches demonstrates a further relationship between online and offline discourse. The presence of these personal expression

examples across platforms implies that discourse on the platforms can influence each other and contribute to a shared overall movement discourse.

### The Periphery on Social Media

The third key finding in this research is the shaping of a peripheral identity in social media discourse, separating the periphery of the movement from the movement itself and the opposition. This separation takes place through expressing pride and thankfulness to the movement, referring to the movement as saviors, and references to supporting the movement rather than joining the movement. Statements on Twitter thanked the 'students' and 'kids' for their activism, including, 'These are strong kids. Smart kids. Articulate kids. Determined kids. I'm proud to be their teacher & watch them become outspoken advocates,' as well as the statement,

> *To the students who created this twitter and are organizing for change, I am so sorry leaders have failed you and this burden has fallen on your shoulders. I am so damn proud of what you're doing.*

Both of these statements include references to 'I' as separate from the 'kids,' 'students,' and 'you,' creating a distinction between the author, who is proud of the movement, and the movement itself, rather than expressing the self as part of the movement. Similarly, the Tweets 'The young people will set us free!' and 'For the first time in years, I'm inspired that change is possible. These kids are going to make it happen!' represent the 'kids' and the 'young people' as saviors of 'us,' the heroes who will create change. The statements give agency to the movement, represented as young people, without acknowledging agency in the author of the Tweet, creating a separation between the self or 'us' and the movement.

Several Tweets do acknowledge agency in the periphery group but still separate the periphery with the movement itself. For example, statements such as 'Be the change, and keep inspiring all those around you. What can I do to help you?' imply that 'I' can help, but not join, the movement. The statement 'Don't tell these kids what to do. Empower, mentor, & teach them how to use their voices,' takes this sentiment further, stating that the outside group, those who are not the 'kids,' should only support from the outside. Other statements acknowledge the presence of both the movement, the periphery, and the enemy, such as:

> *To those who are attacking these young advocates, you are wasting your time. They have mobilized, they are brilliant and they won't be stopped. Not this time. And we have their backs.*

In this case, 'those' are the opposition, 'young advocates' are the movement, but 'we' are the outsiders who support but do not join the movement.

The idea of a periphery formed in social movement discourse on social media connects to Kavada's (2015) notion that connective action may only be relevant to the outsiders, rather than those in the collective. In Kavada's (2015) theorization, activists can use social media for traditional collective action purposes, but connective action on social media is only relevant to the outsiders who support the movement through personal expression. The use of connective action discourses in both speeches from movement leadership and Tweets implies that the idea is not only relevant to the periphery, however. At the same time, social media does appear to empower the periphery to take part in movement discourse where outsiders would not have had as accessible an outlet to participate without engaging in collective action. Since social media allows more individuals to speak, a personal identity as an outsider emerges. In terms of implications for modern movements, this could indicate that online communication gives a bigger voice to the periphery, which could encourage that group to be more involved or could cause a separation, enabling people to feel comfortable not joining the collective.

## CONCLUSION

Similar constructions of collective identity on Twitter and in speeches align with Milan (2015) that collective identity is still at the heart of social movements, and does not necessarily align with Kavada (2015) that social media makes identity boundaries blurred. However, there are also examples on both platforms that construct many different collective identities, aligning with Fominaya's (2010) idea that collective identity can be multiple and diverse. Additionally, examples of personal expression aligning with Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) definition of connective action arose online and offline, implying not only that connective action is relevant even as collective identity is still constructed, but also that the logic of connective action also influences discourse in traditional offline settings. Finally, social media discourse appeared to shape a peripheral identity that was not present in speeches. This periphery connects to

Kavada's (2015) notion that connective action may only be relevant for those in the peripheral of the movement, not active participants but outsiders supporting the cause. Although connective action does appear to be relevant outside of the periphery, the creation of a collective peripheral identity on social media suggests implications of social media discourse on mobilization for the cause.

These findings could help add to the overall understanding of how social movements can create effective communication strategies. Depending on how March For Our Lives' success or failure is viewed, its tactics could inform better messaging from future gun control or other social movements. MFOL might be considered a success as new regulations were passed in Florida on the state level, including raising the minimum wage for gun sales and allocating mental health resources to schools (Dziobak, 2023). Additionally, they achieved a federal ban on bump stocks, and youth voting in the 2018 midterm election reached a record high of 28% (Dziobak, 2023). However, the movement might also be considered a failure, as the bump stock ban was recently overturned and no other significant federal gun control legislation has passed in the six years since the movement (Dziobak, 2023).

If MFOL is regarded as successful, findings in this research might indicate that continuing to focus on collective identity in both online and offline discourse while allowing for diverse identities to arise is useful. Otherwise, the analysis might suggest that movements should either take a more strict approach to collective identity, without allowing for diversity or abandoning it altogether in favor of personal identification. Further research could build on these findings to explore the implications of these discursive strategies across other movements. Additionally, the success or failure of MFOL could indicate whether tapping into the logic of connective action alongside collective action discourse and strategies is effective.

Further research could also explore the impact of peripheral voices on movement mobilization and resilience over time. Additionally, new investigations could take a wider look at connective action examples in traditional offline action and how far it has permeated that space. Beyond discourse, other scholars could interview participants in MFOL on whether their perceptions of collective identity align with those arising in online and offline discourse and whether they impact participant's decisions to engage.

If the relevance of collective identity is in question, the PICAR ontology and other definitions that hold collective identity as a fundamental part of social movements are also called into debate. As Cammaerts (2021) posits, the emergence of hybrid social movements with much of their engagement online could call for a new ontology of social movements overall. However, this research suggests that movement discourse, even in online engagement, constructs collective identities alongside instances of connective action, implying that collective identity could remain an essential aspect of movements even as the logic of connective action influences movement discourse.

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## APPENDIX

As noted in the methodology section, the coding and annotation of the speeches and Tweets is divided into four categories: 1) referential strategies (red), 2) predicational strategies (purple), 3) argumentation strategies (green), and 4) intensification or mitigation strategies (blue). This appendix includes one coded and annotated speech example: the annotated David Hogg Speech (March For Our Lives, 2018a).

**Key:**
Red = naming
Purple = predication
Green = argumentation
Blue = intensification/mitigation strategies

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXC-SSdCEMg

David Hogg

intensifying the argument that Rubio chose money over lives

First off I'm going to start off by putting this price tag right here as a reminder for you guys to know how much Marco Rubio took for every student's life in Florida, $1.05.

starts with the personal, "you" as the audience, him v. a specific politician

the entire federal government grouped as the enemy

OK. The cold grasp of corruption shackles the District of Columbia. The winter is over.

they are corrupt, cold, we are change, warm

Change is here. The sun shines on a new day. And the day is ours. For the, first time voters show up 18 percent of the time in midterm elections. Not anymore.

focus on young voters

collective "we"

idea that voting, especially young people voting, is the solution

Now, who here is going to vote in the 2018 election?

If you listen real close, you can hear the people in power shaking.

"you" as the audience

enemy as all people in power, "they" v. "we"

they are cowards

They've gotten used to being protective of their position, the safety of inaction. Inaction is no longer safe. And to that we say no more.

"we" will be able to make change

Ninety-six people -- 96 people die every day from guns in our country. Yet, most representatives have no public stance on guns. And to that we say no more!

cowardice

the people who die and "we" v. the politicians

voting is the solution

We're going to make this the voting issue. We're going to take this to every election to every state and every city. We're going to make sure the best people get in our elections to run not as politicians but as Americans. Because this --

they are not the best people

we as Americans v. politicians

-- this is not cutting it.

When people try to suppress your vote and there are people who stand against you
tying in the individual being surpressed to the group standing up
because you're too young, we say no more.
"we" are young

NRA & politicians v. individuals, and we stand up to them
When politicians say that your voice doesn't matter because the NRA owns them, we
say no more.
politicians do nothing, are corrupt
argument that they shouldn't listen to those saying that protest doesn't matter

When politicians send their thoughts and prayers with no action, we say no more.

politicians/NRA as the enemy of "our" children, and children are the future
And to those politicians supported by the NRA that allow the continued slaughter of our
politicians don't care about children
children and our future, I say get your resumes ready. speaking directly to politicians, using "I"
intensification = "we" want you out of power, threatening

idea of youth and spring tied to "we" "we" are democracy
Today is the beginning of spring. And tomorrow is the beginning of democracy.

Now is the time to come together not as Democrats, not as Republicans, but as
Americans. "we" are Americans

"we" are people that care about children & the future
Americans of the same flesh and blood that care about one thing and one thing only,
and that's the future of the country and the children that are going to lead it.
children and the future as the thing the "we" group cares about
children are leaders

clear "them" v. "we"

Now, they will try to separate us in demographics. They will try to separate us by religion, race, congressional district and class. They will fail.

they are divisive, we are inclusive

intensification = harsh language

We will come together. We will get rid of these public servants that only serve the gun lobby. And we will save lives! You are those heroes.

repeating "we", but connecting it to the individual, too

"we" and "you" as brave, unlike politicians

Lastly, let's put the USA over the NRA.

This is the start of the spring and the blossoming of our democracy. So let's take this to our local legislatures and let's take this to midterm elections. Because without the persistent heat, without the persistence of voters and Americans everywhere getting out to every election, democracy will not flourish, but it can, and it will.

the movement = democracy, needs persistance

So I say to those politicians, I say change will not come. I say we will not stop until every man, every woman, every child and every American can live without fear of gun violence. And to that, I say no more.

him as an individual speaking for the collective to the enemy, on behalf of individuals

"we" are inclusive, they are divisive, and therefore we represent the people and they don't

Thank you, I love you all, god bless all of you and god bless America. We can, and we will change the world.

unstoppable, persistant, agents of change