

Learning Through Practice: Participatory Culture Civics

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Abstract:

To what extent are young Americans engaged in civic life today? Where can they learn the skills they need to be civically active? We believe that young people are engaging with civic issues in places that may surprise those researching more established sites of civic learning.

Specifically, we focus our attention on what we call “Participatory Culture Civics” (PCC) organizations. These organizations are rooted within “participatory cultures”, defined as cultures that have a strong sense of community, relatively low barriers to participation, informal mentorship structures and support for creating and sharing one’s creations (Jenkins et. al., 2006). PCC organizations build on participatory cultures and mobilize them toward explicit civic purposes.

Our case studies, Invisible Children (IC) and the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), are examples of such PCC organizations. Inspired by "Dumbledore's Army" in the Harry Potter narratives, HPA has been organizing fans around political and philanthropic issues since 2005. IC employs film and spectacle to engage its members in humanitarian aid for Uganda. During the study period, these organizations each won a round of the Chase Community Giving competition on Facebook, demonstrating their ability to activate and mobilize civic networks, online and off.

In this report, we present the civic practices of the HPA and IC, defined as activities that support organized collective action towards civic goals. We group these civic practices into four clusters. The distinctive cluster of “Create” practices (including Build Communities, Tell Stories and Produce Media) strongly builds on the organizations’ foundation within participatory cultures. The other three clusters (Inform, Connect, Organize & Mobilize) have more in common with traditional civic organizations, but remain informed by the unique nature of PCCs. All of the practice clusters make extensive use of media, and particularly new media. In fact, engagement with media is a crucial dimension of PCCs.

We argue that, while different in many respects, both HPA and IC combine civic goals with the shared pleasures and flexible affordances of participatory culture.

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Introduction

Kendra: One thing I have to say about my generation is that we're just not given the tools, and so we need to supplement the ideas and the tools.

Interviewer: [By] tools, you mean?

Kendra: Tools in terms of knowing how to organize, knowing how to recruit, knowing how to event plan, knowing how to reach people, like a very effective strategic way of reaching people. [...] And I think you're right, with the digital revolution it's completely changed.

(Kendra, Invisible Children club president, 3/17/2011)

Kendra's observation above points to a generation-based disconnect between established and youth-driven definitions of the skills needed to effectively engage in civic activities. If the tools and tactics through which young people engage in civic life have changed, as Kendra suggests, where can young people acquire them? And where can they learn to navigate and master the constantly changing online environment towards these civic goals? Our answers may surprise those researching more established sites of civic learning.

Specifically, we focus our attention on what we call "Participatory Culture Civics" (PCC) organizations. These organizations are rooted within "participatory cultures": cultures which share a strong sense of community, have relatively low barriers to participation, informal mentorship

structures and support for creating and sharing one's creations (Jenkins et. al., 2006). PCC organizations build on these participatory practices to organize and mobilize for explicitly *civic* purposes. We view the world of civics broadly, to include civic activities like charity, community service or activism, as well as electoral activities like voting or campaign work (Youniss et al. 2002; see also Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Zukin et al., 2006).

Participatory Culture Civics (PCC) organizations are rooted in participatory cultures and build on these practices to organize towards explicit civic goals.

We define civic practices as *activities that support organized collective action towards*

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civic goals. We argue that PCC organizations are effective at fostering some traditional kinds of civic skills, and have also developed unique new approaches

that reflect their distinctive character.¹ Our work on Participatory Culture Civics (PCC) developed prior to, and later in conversation with, current research efforts of the Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP) Network.² As such, we recognize possible connections between PCC and the YPP notion of “participatory politics”, defined as “peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern” (Cohen & Kahne 2012, p. vi). Both PCC and participatory politics focus on the “how” of participation as a crucial entry point into understanding current youth engagement. Both concepts also share a focus on peer-to-peer and informal processes. At the same time, we remain cognizant of definitional nuances between participatory politics and PCC. For one, PCC attributes more explicit significance to the cultural dimensions of participation. PCC organizations build on and cultivate peer-to-peer connections between members, and in particular, highlight ties rooted in participatory cultures. We will, however, continue to explore the ways in which PCC connects to YPP’s evolving concept of participatory politics.

Drawing on qualitative research of two PCC organizations (the Harry Potter Alliance and Invisible Children), we ask: What civic practices do these groups encourage and support? How can these organizations scaffold young people’s acquisition of tools and experiences germane to civic life? Why are these PCC organizations well situated for these goals? And, how do members’ experiences differ from participation in more ‘traditional’ civic organizations?

¹ For an overview of the practices identified, see p. 16.

² For more details about the YPP network, see: <http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/>.

Civic Learning: What Is It and Where Can It Be Found?

Scholarly research has focused attention on young people's civic education in the United States over the past decades. Scholars often worry that young people's withdrawal from civic and political engagement is so significant that it endangers the healthy functioning of democracies (Galston, 2001; Macedo et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000). Acknowledging this perspective and arguing that "individuals do not automatically become free and responsible citizens but must be educated for citizenship" (CIRCLE 2003, p. 4), a body of literature focuses on ways to encourage young people's civic learning. The bulk of this research, however, focuses on in-school learning contexts. The Civic Mission of Schools report (CIRCLE, 2003) argues that public education has the ability to reach virtually all youth; can teach the cognitive aspects of citizenship; offers communities for learning; and bears new responsibilities since "several non-school institutions have lost the capacity or will to engage young people civically" (p. 12). The report argues that political parties or religious organizations suffer from decreasing membership and seem to be increasingly out of touch with younger populations.

A parallel strand of research has dealt with civic *participation*. Sonia Livingstone (2009, p.140-1) makes an important distinction between civic education and participation in her examination of online civic media. Much of this media, she claims, takes the civic education approach, seeing young people as 'citizens-in-the-making', and focusing on preparing them for their future adult responsibilities. In such contexts, young people are seen as potentially learning civic skills and sharing ideas with others. However, this approach pays limited attention to youth's present rights and responsibilities or to their ability to bring about actual change. By contrast, young participants in PCC organizations work together to bring change on personal, local, national, and global levels, in a model that combines civic education with civic participation.

For this reason, we entitle our report “learning through practice”. Many ‘traditional’ civic organizations enable youth to participate based on an apprenticeship model, in which they work under the guidance of trained experts (see, e.g., Kirshner, 2006, 2008). PCC organizations exhibit a more participatory model, in which young people are in charge, taking control of and shaping their modes of engagement. In this model, learning happens not only vertically, from expert to novice, but also horizontally, from peer-to-peer. The organizations we study acknowledge their role as civic educators and scaffold their members’ learning as they simultaneously pursue civic goals. In addition, we see implicit learning, which occurs for participants as they engage in and lead civic action. In each of the practices we will describe, we will see these two types of learning, namely: “learning through mentorship” and “learning through doing”.

The notion that civic participation is also an opportunity for civic learning is, by no means, new. In their foundational work on civic skills, Verba et al. (1995) found that participation within organizations that are not explicitly political can help hone skills that can later be applied to political contexts. The workplace, religious institutions and non-political voluntary organizations are all recognized as important sites for such learning. However, their findings are limited in several ways. For one, Verba et al. (1995) focus on *political* participation, oriented toward government. They only value participation in civic spheres (for example, volunteering in the local community) as a possible avenue leading to political participation. We, instead, see a wide range of civic activities as valuable in their own right. Second, while Verba et al. broadly define civic skills as “the communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life” (p. 304), their measures are quite narrowly defined. They focus on verbal skills and respondents’ opportunity to practice (in the

past 6 months) activities such as writing a letter, going to a meeting where they participated in decision-making, planning or chairing a meeting, or giving a presentation or a speech (p. 311). Finally, they focus on specific institutions: work places, voluntary associations and churches. In contrast, we claim that civic skills can be acquired through many other sites, particularly new media contexts.

Participatory cultures (Jenkins et al., 2006), including those around fandom, gaming, and online knowledge production (e.g. Wikipedia) represent powerful examples of alternative sites for learning and participation. Participatory cultures often blur the distinction between friendship-driven and interest-driven activities online (Ito et al., 2009), as young people may gather around shared interests while simultaneously forming friendships through participation. PCC groups offer opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, cultural expression, and civic empowerment, within contexts that invite and reward active participation.

In a related endeavor, Kahne, Lee and Feezell (2011) examine how young people's interest-driven online activities may "serve as a gateway to participation in important aspects of civic and, at times, political life ranging from volunteer activity, to engagement in community problem solving, to protest activities, to political voice" (p. 15). Kahne et al. found a correlation between young people's interest-driven participation online and increased civic behavior, including volunteering, group membership, and political expression. Notably, this form of online participation did *not* directly relate to participation in traditional electoral politics, like political campaigns or voting. In fact, many scholars (e.g. Zukin et al, 2006; Eliasoph 2011; Levine, 2007) worry that volunteering and community service activities increasingly popular among young people may be disconnected from traditional electoral politics and may not give youth the tools they need to participate in formal political arenas.

Offering a different interpretation, Bennett and his colleagues (Bennett, 1998; Bennett, 2007, 2008; Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011) argue that young people's changing forms of participation may represent a new model of citizenship. They distinguish this new model from what have been the dominant models of citizenship over the past century (such as the informed or dutiful citizen), which depended on access to knowledge or a sense of responsibility. Under Bennett et al.'s "Self Actualizing Citizen" model, motivations to participate arise from social expression, with action promoted within trusted peer-to-peer relationships. Young people often attribute more meaning to emergent forms of "creative civic expression" (Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010, p. 398), including consumer politics (boycotts and buycotts), transnational activism, community volunteering, and creative expression online (e.g. writing blogs or creating political videos) than they do to voting.

The different citizenship models are also connected to different styles of civic learning. Bennett, Wells and Rank (2009) claim that the dutiful citizenship model is closely linked to in-school learning, characterized by one-way knowledge transmission, passive media consumption, and external assessment standards. In contrast, the self-actualizing citizenship model tends towards learning environments that are interactive, project-based, horizontally networked and participatory, as learners participate in creating content and assessing its credibility (p. 108). As already suggested, we similarly find that members of PCC organizations learn not through one-way transmission, but rather through active participation that is supplemented through peer-to-peer and other mentorship. However, while Bennett focuses on individuals and their self-actualization, our case studies highlight the continued importance of communities, networks, and organizations in encouraging and sustaining participation that is directed toward the public good.

Participatory cultures represent new and powerful sites for learning that can harness young people’s enthusiasms and interests towards civic routes.

The HPA and IC as Participatory Culture Civics Organizations

Based at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California and led by Henry Jenkins, the Civic Paths Project examines the intersection between participatory culture and civic engagement. Between 2009 and 2011, we documented two PCC organizations: the Harry Potter Alliance and Invisible Children.³

The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) is a nonprofit organization, established in 2005 by activist Andrew Slack. Inspired by the student activist organization “Dumbledore’s Army” in the Harry Potter narratives, the HPA uses parallels from the fictional content world as an impetus for civic action. It mobilizes over a hundred thousand young people across the U.S.—mostly, but not

Established in 2005, the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) has tapped the Harry Potter fan community to mobilized young people to take civic action.

exclusively, Harry Potter fans—focusing on issues of literacy, equality and human rights. Building on volunteer staff members and a dispersed network of local chapters, the HPA has run a diverse set of campaigns, such as Accio books, an annual book drive,

in which members have donated over 87,000 books to local and international communities;

Wizard Rock the Vote, registering 1100 voters in Wizard Rock concerts across the nation; and

Wrock 4 Equality, a phone-banking campaign to protect marriage equality rights in Maine. The

³ The fieldwork on this project was funded by the New Civics Initiative at Spencer Foundation. Later analysis of the data collected has been supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s Youth and Participatory Politics network.

HPA has also partnered up with other organizations, for instance to raise over \$123,000 for Partners in Health in two weeks, as part of the Helping Haiti Heal campaign.

In 2003, three young Southern California film students who traveled to Africa created the

Striving to end the war in Uganda, Invisible Children has mobilized youth through its innovative media. Subject to much criticism, their KONY2012 became the fastest spreading online film.

documentary film *Invisible Children: Rough Cut*. This unconventional film documents the long-running civil war in Uganda and focuses on night commuters (children who migrate daily to avoid being kidnapped) and child soldiers abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (the LRA). The three students founded Invisible

Children, an organization dedicated to “use the power of media to inspire young people to help end the longest running war in Africa” (www.invisiblechildren.com). IC's campaigns—notably the “Global Night Commute” and “Displace Me”, two nationwide demonstrations that each drew over 70,000 young participants—urged the U.S. government to pass the LRA disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act in May 2010. Since then, IC has shifted focus to other countries where the LRA is active, specifically the Congo and Central African Republic. IC also continues its work in Uganda, focusing on long-term development. They fund and oversee the rebuilding of schools, offer scholarships to students, and have installed a radio transmitted emergency message system to warn local inhabitants if the LRA is approaching. In the United States, IC's activities focus primarily on awareness-raising, fundraising and political action to end the LRA's armed conflict. Operating through a network of staff, supporters, roadies, and local high school and college chapters, IC reaches hundreds of thousands of young people throughout the US.

IC reached national, and international, attention in March 2012 with the release of *KONY 2012*, a half-hour long documentary that became the fastest spreading video of all time, reaching

112 million views in six days (<http://corp.visiblemeasures.com>). While our field work predated this event, we believe that our findings provide context for understanding the controversy around *KONY 2012*⁴, by offering important insights into the ways groups like IC mobilize, organize, communicate and relate to their members.

Both IC and HPA define themselves as “new” activist organizations. They see themselves as “young” organizations taking new approaches to long-standing social and civic issues. Jill, an IC member, describes IC as “a youth generated and youth empowering movement” (Jill, IC, 8/5/2010). While many traditional non-profits tap online tools, the HPA and IC are deeply embedded within participatory cultures. Given this, we see IC and HPA as examples of Participatory Culture Civics (PCC) organizations. PCC organizations are rooted within, and build on, the structures created by participatory cultures, but they direct participants towards explicit civic purposes. HPA builds on the infrastructure of Harry Potter fandom; IC relies on the peer-to-peer circulation system of its videos.

As PCC organizations, both HPA and IC actively engage media, particularly new media. Not only do they produce and draw on media content, both organizations also use new media as crucial, at times indispensable, communication and organizational tools. Their members are also invited to participate in shaping the organizations through forum discussions, blog posts or video making. Both organizations won the Chase Community Giving Competition—a campaign in which charities that garner the most votes on Facebook receive large grants from Chase bank. While clearly distinct in ways that will become more apparent through our analysis, the HPA and IC are both media-centric organizations. That said, we found that separating new media use from “offline” activity was *not* analytically helpful. For PCC organizations, new media are not just

⁴ For more background on *KONY 2012* and the debate around it see http://henryjenkins.org/2012/03/a_brief_outline_of_kony_2012_a.html

tools to be utilized; such groups are organized around and through these means. But, both organizations also have a national participatory network of local chapters (HPA) or clubs (IC) where members meet on a regular basis, and engage in independent social projects. HPA chapters and IC clubs enjoy a high degree of autonomy in deciding the scope and structure of their activities. Therefore, we stress the media-centered participatory structures of these groups, rather than simply seeing them as “online” communities.

Media use within these PCCs is both vertical (leadership driven) and horizontal (peer-to-peer driven), remaining firmly rooted in the participatory practices of these communities. Importantly, both IC and the HPA engage in both internally and externally focused media use and production. At times, they also blur the boundaries between these intended audiences. For example, even before *KONY 2012*, IC encouraged peer-to-peer circulation of their films by including an extra copy to share with every DVD sold. These films were also accessible to a more general public. Similarly, the HPA actively connects its campaigns to the narrative themes from J.K. Rowling’s popular Harry Potter book series, often encouraging members to create media content around these connections. As our later discussion will reveal, the media HPA members create is often internally focused as it makes use of narrative references familiar to Harry Potter fans. The tensions of internal and externally-focused media run through our discussion of HPA and IC as PCC organizations.

Henry Jenkins and colleagues’ work on *Spreadable Media* (forthcoming) further informs our understanding of HPA and IC as media-centric PCC organizations. For one, we draw on their distinction between “distribution” (top-down broadcast media models) and “circulation” (bottom-up trust-based sharing of media content) to explore media dynamics within these organizations. In addition, our analysis builds on the proposed tense relationship between

“drillability” and “spreadability”. According to this model, spreadability refers to “an emerging hybrid model of circulation, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways.” (Jenkins et al., forthcoming). In contrast, “drillability,” articulated by Jason Mittell (2009), describes the “vertical descent into a text's complexities”, or in our context, digging deep into civic issues. We use these terms to consider the use of media in our PCC organizations, while also pointing to possible challenges these media practices may create when deployed in civic spaces.

Considered together, these tensions (inward/outward facing communication, distribution/circulation, and spreadability/drillability) become crucial to our understanding of HPA and IC. These groups’ negotiation between top-down organizational and bottom up participatory practices may, in many ways, be crucial to their ability to engage youth and encourage them to use to media to express, share, connect, as well as organize and mobilize towards civic goals.

In previous work on the HPA and IC, we focused on members’ experiences and identified three *components of experience* central to these organizations’ recruitment, mobilization and sustained action: shared media experiences, a sense of community, and wish to help (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2012). The ‘shared media experiences’ refer to members’ coming together around texts that had a particular resonance for them. For the HPA, they appropriate themes and icons from mainstream culture; where-as IC has built a following around its own media products. These shared media

Previous research by Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2012) identified three components of experience (shared media experiences, sense of community, and wish to help) as key to HPA and IC’s recruitment, mobilization, and sustained action.

experiences constitute shared cultural capital between participants and become central to members' identities. Moreover, in their mobilization efforts, these organizations successfully build on existing 'community structures'—for example, those of Harry Potter fandom, or of local schools, colleges and churches. Both groups create powerful intersections of “friendship-based” and “interest-based” networks (Ito et al., 2009): young people take social action with their friends, and then forge stronger affiliation with these networks.

While these first two components are strongly linked to experiences common within participatory culture and fandom, PCC group members also mention a third component of experience, more familiar from “traditional” civic engagement: an altruistic desire, a ‘wish to help’. Here, members describe their commitment to help others outside their narrow communities, often expressed in terms of social justice, equality or structural change. For some members, this desire comes from parental socialization, political views or faith (traditional influences on youth’s emerging political identities) while others are inspired by their participation in shared activities, such as watching IC films or attending Wizard Rock concerts.

The pleasurable nature and emotional investment of such shared activities raises inevitable questions about the importance of affect for PCC organizations. What is the role of affect in civic and political engagement? Can emotional investment undermine rational considerations for participation? Brough and Shresthova (2012) grapple with similar questions in their discussion of the connection and dissonance between cultural and political participation. As they point out, there is now a growing body of work in various disciplines that complicates the privileging of the rational at the expense of the emotional in civic and political engagement. Alberto Melucci (1989) stresses the affective dimensions of understanding why people join social movements. Poletta & Jasper (2001) call to further examine the role of emotions shaping

collective identity within social movements. Lisbet van Zoonen (2005) stresses affective ties as the bond that ties together not only fan communities, but also political constituencies. Stephen Duncombe (2007) points to the ways in which affect and emotion can be used as key drivers supporting and sustaining activism. Relying on this body of work, our research endeavors to explain how groups like the HPA and IC connect play, fun, sociality, and affect with civic action. *Simply put, without these affective components, these organizations would not be able to offer their members the civic learning opportunities we discuss here.*

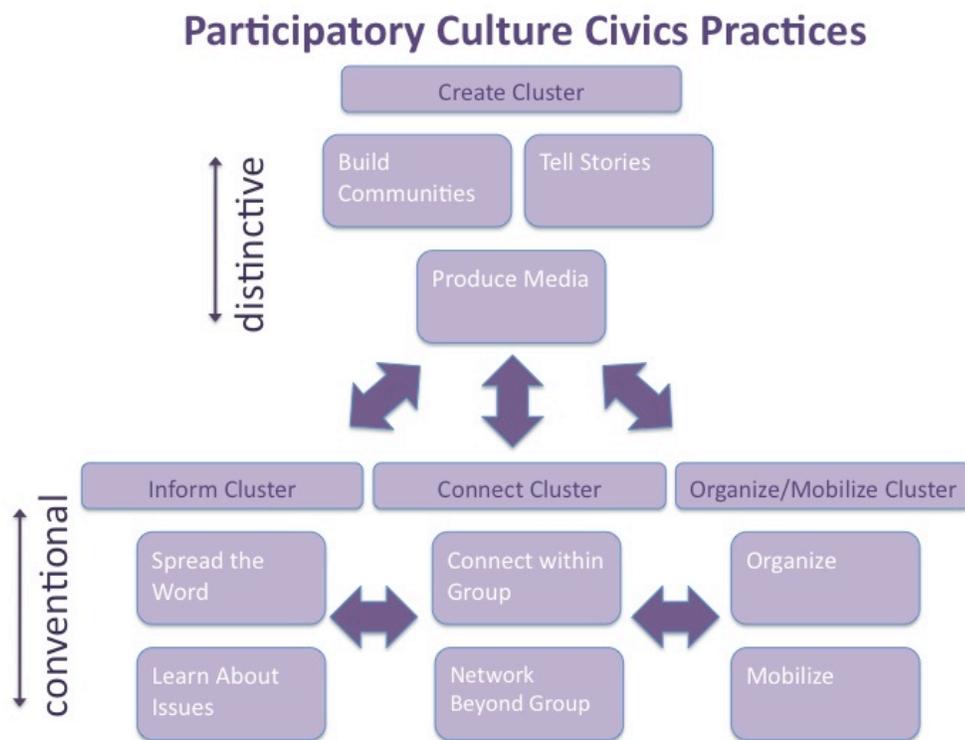
The Practices of Participatory Culture Civics

The rest of this report focuses on the civic practices which HPA and IC foster among their members. Civic practices are defined as *activities that support organized collective action towards civic goals*. We identify these civic practices based on qualitative research carried out between 2009 and 2011.⁵ Our research includes media content analysis, participant-observation in events, and 60 interviews with HPA and IC staff and highly engaged members of local chapters.⁶ We are focusing here on practices that were most prominent in our data and interview transcripts. After defining the emergent list of practices, we coded the data for these practices, identifying points of overlap in order to create relatively exclusive categories. While they sometimes manifest differently, both HPA and IC demonstrate these practices. Not every group member may engage in all of these practices, and members may engage with them to varying degrees depending on different levels of engagement and participation. In many cases, engaging in these civic practices may motivate and intensify future participation.

⁵ This study was reviewed and approved by the Internal Review Board at the University of Southern California.

⁶ Different terms are used across the two organizations to refer to local groups and their leaders. HPA calls local groups ‘chapters’, with leaders are ‘chapter organizers’. IC’s local groups are called ‘clubs’, and their leaders are ‘club presidents’. In the following, the respective terms will be used when referring to each organization separately, but the terms ‘groups’ and ‘group leaders’ will refer to both of these organizations together.

This chart provides an overview of the practices we identified through our analysis of HPA and IC:



We group the practices into clusters that reflect both their scope and connection to each other.

We identify practices in the “Create” cluster (build communities, tell stories, and produce media) as distinctive to PCC organizations:

Distinctive Cluster	Practices
<p>CREATE: <i>Practices that focus on the creation, sharing and building of community ties encouraged through media and narrative.</i></p>	<p>Build Communities: <i>Build, encourage and sustain community affiliations and friendships, not only to promote civic goals but as valuable in their own right.</i></p> <p>Tell Stories: <i>Create and use narratives in ways that encourage emotional investment and connection to the organization</i></p> <p>Produce Media: <i>Encourage and sustain action through media creation and circulation</i></p>

These three distinctive practices, in turn, inform the more conventional practices clusters (Inform, Connect, and Organize & Mobilize), which PCC organizations share with other, more traditional, civic organizations:

Conventional Clusters	Practices
INFORM: <i>Practices that focus on the acquisition and sharing of information</i>	<i>Learn About Issues: Learn, and come to care about, social issues</i> <i>Spread the Word: Inform others (both within and outside the group) about the organization, its causes, and the social issues it promotes</i>
CONNECT: <i>Practices that support communication with other group members and strategic networking with those beyond the group</i>	<i>Connect Within the Group: Create, maintain and participate in structures that enable dialogue and exchange among group members</i> <i>Network Beyond the Group: Network with individuals and communities beyond the group to foster partnerships that further the organizations' goals</i>
ORGANIZE AND MOBILIZE: <i>Practices that build structures to scaffold and motivate members towards sustained civic action.</i>	<i>Organize: Sustain organizational, logistical and operational dimensions of setting up, recruiting for and running local chapters and clubs</i> <i>Mobilize: Motivate and engage yourself and others towards episodic and sustained collective action</i>

As previously mentioned, HPA and IC are both media-centric organizations. Consequently, all the civic practices identified here engage media in some way. In the “Create” cluster, we focus on the ways in which both IC and HPA create and use existing media. In the “Inform” practices cluster we highlight media tools for information gathering and sharing. The “Connect” cluster emphasizes communication practices that help the members and organizations establish ties with those inside and outside the group. And, the “Organize & Mobilize” cluster directs attention to the strategies and structures that scaffold episodic and sustained civic action. As the arrows in the diagram suggest, we believe the practice clusters inform and support each other.

In the next section, we define the practices in each cluster and offer examples of how they work in both our case study organizations.

Distinctive Practices Cluster: “Create” Practices

The practices in this cluster focus on the creation, sharing and community ties encouraged through media and narrative.

CREATE CLUSTER

Build Communities: *Build, encourage and sustain community affiliations and friendships, not only to promote civic goals but as valuable in their own right.*

Tell Stories: *Create and use narratives in ways that encourage emotional investment and connection to the organization*

Produce Media: *Encourage and sustain action through media creation and circulation*

Build Communities: PCC organizations build, encourage and sustain community affiliations and friendships, which then scaffold the groups’ civic actions. Our earlier work (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2012) found that friendship ties were a key motivation for members to join such

The “Build Communities” practice refers to the ways in which PCC organization build, encourage and sustain community affiliations and friendships, which then scaffold the groups’ civic actions.

groups and stay involved. This finding is not surprising, if we consider the centrality of peer-to-peer connections and friendships for young people (Bukowski, Newcomb & Hartup, 1996), but such social connections are not always central to more traditional political organizations. PCC groups work hard to foster such bonds between

members.

HPA brings people together through a shared affection for Harry Potter. As one HPA staff member explains:

That's the big thing for me, like I love the books so much [...] but Harry Potter wouldn't mean nearly as much to me if it weren't for the community. (Kara, HPA staff member, 2/10/2011)

HPA members use the term “community” to refer both to the Harry Potter Alliance, and, at times, to the broader Harry Potter fandom. The Harry Potter fandom is a large and highly developed one, which by now has a history of over a decade and a half. Contrary to some predictions, the fandom did not die down with the release of the last book in 2007 or the last movie in 2011. Many fans attribute this resilience to the strong ties between community members. The fandom offers many different creative outlets, including fan conventions, fan fiction, role-playing games, wizard rock concerts, theater and musical productions and Quidditch—a new (and growing) sport. As a civic organization, the HPA conducts outreach around the fandom’s existing gatherings and activities. For example, The HPA often runs introductory and training sessions at Harry Potter fan conventions or organizes to register voters through its “Wrock the Vote” campaigns at Wizard Rock concerts.

In addition, the HPA taps the rich story world of Harry Potter to help members relate to each other and act collectively. For example, many Harry Potter fans claim affiliation with one of the “houses” at Hogwarts⁷. Such affiliations allow them to imagine a more intimate connection between their own identities and the world depicted in Rowling’s novels. Building on these affiliations, many HPA campaigns include “house-competitions” where members can win points for their respective houses, for example, by donating the most books or registering voters.

Despite the community’s strong social ties, many HPA members see themselves as shy and introverted:

I think a lot of these friends in particular that are joining like myself are rather shy, when it comes to actually striking up a conversation with someone [...]. And

⁷ “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry” is a boarding school of magic in the Harry Potter narratives.

so the Harry Potter thing is going to be helpful, because it's something that you can kind of glue on to. (Jenna, HPA member, 2/18/2011)

Many members are as much motivated by opportunities to socialize with others as by a desire to change the world:

I think there's this balance that for them it's equal parts making a difference and equal parts meeting more people, and connecting with people that probably are kinder to them in a way or just more similar to them. (Virginia, HPA chapter organizer, 1/13/2011)

Some HPA members claim they would be intimidated by “traditional” non-profits, which might lack these shared interests and community bonds.

Establishing community ties is also a crucial practice for Invisible Children. Staff and members claim such social connections are part of what distinguishes their organization from other more traditional non-profits. For example, IC interns come to the headquarters for a period of two months, working during the day and sharing a house with other volunteers at night. Ruth, one such intern, compares this to other professional settings:

It's something that first struck me when I got here, was that Invisible Children is a lot about relationships and it's not just this disconnect [...] you work together, you play together, you eat together, you know? (Ruth, IC intern, 7/14/2010)

More casual participants, who attend IC events and movie screenings, also experience this sense of friendship. Roadies, who travel across the country for several months, screen IC films at schools, colleges and churches. Roadies personally introduce the screenings and conduct Q&A session, encouraging connections between audience members. One roadie explains their role:

These are actual people and you are giving a personal connection, which I think is lacking in a lot of organizations. People connect with Invisible Children not just because of the cause or because of the movie, they connect because they know the roadies [...] There is a big personal touch and there is a face to what they are giving, it's not as distant as some organizations can be. (Tina, IC roadie, 8/5/2010)

While HPA and IC have a lot in common in establishing community ties, there are also some important differences between their communities. HPA builds on the connection to Harry

Potter and a sense of shared identity to drive civic goals. IC members foreground common goals as a key characteristic of their community, where members are “*all so different*” and yet “*united by this one thing*” (Adam, IC member, 3/19/2011). Despite these differences, HPA and IC members are at a time of their life when they negotiate identity and status among peers (Bukowski et al., 1996). While many youth civic organizations bracket such peer-to-peer connections as personal and therefore secondary concerns, PCC organizations integrate social connections, friendships, and community into all their activities.

Tell Stories: The “Tell Stories” practice describe how PCC organizations and their members use narratives to encourage emotional investment in their goals. Long recognized as an important

The practice of “Telling Stories” describes how the organizations, and individuals in them, create and use narrative in ways that encourage emotional investment and connection to the organization.

dimension of social movements (Polletta, 2006), our definition foregrounds storytelling as a “collective activity in which individuals and groups contribute to the telling, retelling, and remixing of stories through various media platforms” (Brough and Shresthova, 2012). “Content worlds” become central to both HPA and IC storytelling

activities as members’ shared stories become experiences, which in turn motivate participation.

For IC, the core content world includes their long-form documentary films as well as shorter video clips, Twitter feeds, blogs, and apparel.⁸ Over time, IC has succeeded in creating not only isolated media artifacts, but constructing a world in which members become a part of the founders’ journey to end the war in Africa. IC members’ first step usually starts with encountering the organization’s media. Members mention IC’s storytelling skills as increasing

⁸ As Lana Swartz has pointed out, IC’s messages are strategically deployed across media—or transmedia—with the aim of promoting activism (Swartz, 2012).

their emotional investment in the cause and connection to other group members. Jenny, an IC roadie explains:

It goes back to the filmmakers and how they have been inspiring people and telling the story, I think it just connects and you want to do something. Once you see the story, you want to give something... and it is easy to pass on the passion of the story and then people want to get involved. (Jenny, IC, 7/29/2010)

Members often recount the founding narrative of IC: the three friends who went to Uganda and were so moved by the plight of the child soldiers that they were compelled to tell their story. For IC members, the first movie, *The Rough Cut*, provides the core of the group's organizational narrative. Watching *The Rough Cut* and other documentaries constitute a core shared experience amongst participants.

IC founders and staff often identify themselves explicitly as storytellers.⁹ While one respondent voiced some dissent around the privileging of American stories within IC, most of the interviewed members were overwhelmingly positive about IC's ability to tell stories, through their films, other media, and merchandise.¹⁰

IC's leadership has been somewhat reticent in encouraging its general membership to narrate their own stories, in particular ones that may move away from the cause's founding myths. IC's storytelling operation is centralized, mostly relying on their core production staff. One effort to move beyond such a centralized narrative and diversify the public face of the organization was the "my IC story" initiative. In preparation for the "Fourth Estate," a retreat for IC's young leaders in 2010, participants were asked to upload and share their first-person video accounts of why they joined IC. At the retreat, IC staff helped participants refine these personal

⁹ See <http://invisiblechildren.com/homepagetabs/what-we-do/>: "We are storytellers, activists and everyday people who use the power of media to inspire young people to help end the longest running armed conflict in Africa."

¹⁰ As a reminder, these interviews took place before the circulation of *KONY 2012*. This last movie has received harsh critique on its depiction of the war in Africa and the role of the US. See, for example, <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2012/03/08/unpacking-kony-2012/>. It is not clear how these critiques shaped members' views of IC media.

accounts. Initially, each participant shared their story with a breakout group of approximately 8-12 participants. The group then provided feedback: Was the story captivating? What were its key points? What information was crucial? Where was the emotional hook? The participants reworked their stories and shared them with the group again. On this second round, the feedback focused on how the story could be made more effective. How would they tell it in a shorter time (one minute versus five minutes)? Later in the day, they also recorded their one-minute IC story at one of the flip camera/iPhone kiosks operated by IC staff who were also on-hand to further advise contributors. These one-minute videos were intended to help IC Fourth Estate participants with their fall fundraising efforts.

The “My IC Story” effort resonates with IC participants’ sense that every member has a valuable story to share:

One of the definite things that I learned from them is that every person has a story. Invisible Children opened my eyes to the uniqueness of every individual and it really transformed the relationships that I had [...] even the kids that you don’t think you are connected to, they have a story, that is so radical and so unique and worthy of being recognized. (Jon, IC, 1/21/2011)

Storytelling is as central for HPA as it is for IC, though it takes different forms. Here, participants are drawn together around their shared investment in the Harry Potter narratives, and they learn how to deploy those stories to explain the group’s goals and mission. Jane, an HPA chapter member, explains:

Whether you use personal stories, or a broader story that a lot more people are familiar with, every group uses some sort of story to explain something or to get people excited and rally people around a cause. It just happens to be that the story we use is a major pop culture phenomenon where people dress up in weird costumes and write songs about things in the books. (Jane, HPA, 7/18/2010)

For HPA, storytelling contributes to what founder Andrew Slack terms “cultural acupuncture” (Slack, 2010). The HPA wants to inspire civic effects by tapping into images and themes that have wider visibility across the culture and resonate with media audiences. For example, Slack

often describes the group as creating a “Dumbledore’s Army for the real world,” situating their civic actions within a larger heroic narrative, allowing them to maintain and extend the fantasies that drew members to Harry Potter. The HPA might cite specific passages from the book as springboards for discussing current events or ask “what would Dumbledore do?” to justify their decision to get involved in a specific campaign.

In comparison with IC, the HPA is generally less concerned with polishing member narratives. Rather, the organization consistently encourages members to circulate their own stories and embraces a DIY aesthetic. For example, in the “Body Bind Horcrux” campaign, HPA members were invited to create blogs and vlogs in which they take part in “denouncing harmful body images and learning to see the beauty in ourselves and others” (HPA, 2011a). Members, mostly but not exclusively female, shared stories about their own experiences in an open and candid manner. The campaign emerged from the anger many fans felt at size restrictions placed on some of the rides at the newly opened Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando (Murray, 2011). Sharing stories became a way of creating awareness around a shared issue (body image), creating a shared identity as well as identifying personal stakes in the concern, and encouraging members to take action (encouraging healthy behaviors in self and others). This effort bridged personal change efforts and larger social struggles. HPA’s approach values fan knowledge or personal disclosure over technical ability, seeking to create a space where everyone can share their stories. By contrast, IC uses storytelling as part of the group’s strategies to communicate the leadership’s goals and vision to members and to offer resources participants can spread to a larger community. Despite recent efforts like “My IC Story,” IC storytelling remains largely centralized and professionalized.

Produce Media: The “Produce Media” civic practice is defined as encouraging and sustaining action through creation and circulation of content. Rooted in legacy media conceptions, “production” raises expectations of elaborate media texts (such as films, songs and radio

The “Produce Media” practice describes how PCC organizations encourage and sustain action through the creation and circulation of media.

programs), which require advanced skills and specialized professional equipment. Participatory culture, on the other hand, is characterized by generally low barriers to artistic expression, and support for

creating and sharing creations with others (Jenkins et al., 2006). Within participatory cultures, many members can and do see themselves as active producers. Technological advancements have lowered the costs of production and broadened access to the tools required for recording, creating, editing and disseminating of images, audio and video. Production might broadly include posting a comment or re-posting a video or blog, as well as creating original (or remixed) content through video, podcasts or blogging. As we will see, production of media content, which is a common practice in participatory culture, is used by PCC orgs to promote civic goals in myriad and distinctive ways.

HPA’s blog and, since 2011, particularly their vlog (video blog) have been central vehicles for communicating with their participants. While the HPA blog addresses mostly existing members, vlog entries are posted on YouTube and circulated via social media to a potentially wider viewership. The vlog connects the HPA with other fan groups, particularly the Nerdfighters (fans of YouTubers John and Hank Green) for whom video has become a dominant communication practice. However, as Lisa, one of the HPA vloggers explains, translating a non-profit organization’s messages into video may be challenging:

It’s a weird thing because there is the YouTube community and for people like wizard rockers or people who just started out as vloggers, it’s very easy to

translate that into video. But for the HPA, you know, we're a non-profit organization and most non-profits don't have vloggers for sure, and their videos are usually something that they'll commission, they're not really engaging or interactive so we've always had to try and reconcile that. (Lisa, HPA vlogger, 4/9/2012)

The HPA's vlog tries to balance between sharing information about the HPA's campaigns and encouraging members to discuss more open-ended topics, as is often the norm in vlogging. The HPA vloggers often found that their most successful vlogs connected the group's communication goals with more general themes of fan interest. Not every HPA vlog is necessarily "about" charity or civic engagement, yet all of them revolve around issues pertinent to the fandom.

HPA vloggers also made a strategic decision about their production standards. While still described as "amateur" or "DIY," many prominent "YouTube celebrities" have become increasingly sophisticated video producers, deploying high-end cameras, lighting, and editing programs. The HPA vloggers decided not compete in this "arms race" and instead are self-consciously "out-of-style":

Having an intro at the beginning with a teaser, that's like out of style, like if people have them at all now they're out-froze and they're usually a lot more professionally made with links to everything that you've done. [...] I mean that's the thing is, that we're not a typical channel so that's where we can get away with these things where they don't quite apply to us. (Lisa, HPA vlogger, 4/9/2012)

HPA vloggers often feel that the viewership is disappointingly low. Around 300 people view an average vlog. The most viewed vlog to date, in which a Harry Potter Alliance vlogger "came out" as an undocumented American, comparing himself to muggle-born wizards, garnered over 15,000 views. At the same time, this admittedly limited viewership is a very active one. The vloggers end every vlog with a question for viewers to answer, often sparking lively dialogue among participants.

IC's production practices differ from those of the HPA. IC's organization has been defined by their media production practices, and members often cite their films as moving people into action:

There is just no way that if you have a beating heart and a pulse in you, that you can watch any of their films and not be moved into action afterwards [...] No matter if it's a bracelet film or the Rough Cut or Go [...] there is always something that resonates within you, just, wow, this is powerful. (Brian, IC member, 7/26/2011)

IC members take great pride in the group's media, which are central tools in spreading their message. "Film screenings" at schools, colleges, and churches are core recruitment events, where live presentations by roadies supplement the films, which remain the central attraction.

IC's founders are former cinema school students, and celebrate in the professionalism of their work. In the IC offices, the media production division is jokingly referred to as "Narnia", and only those working in the division are allowed to enter it, reinforcing its unique status.¹¹

Dan, an intern in IC's media production division, describes his training process:

Yeah, very strict deadlines, but there's a lot of creative freedom. At least with me since I'm an intern, I'll show it to a few of the other, maybe not as high up people, and they've had a lot more training, so we're like, "Oh yeah, what if you switch this around, it may make it a little stronger." (Dan, IC intern, 7/15/2010)

IC interviewees made significantly fewer mentions of collaborative or club-based media production. While club-members did, on occasion, create media to support their local fundraising and other activities, they generally did not feel their own media production was as significant as the media from the centralized production team. Adam, a member of IC's college club, distinguishes the group's media from user-generated content:

Anyone can make a film these days, I'm going to make a YouTube video or something. But the fact that they actually have this really high quality, like high production value films, and I think the music and stuff really plays a part of it [...] I think it flows really well together. (Adam, IC, 3/19/2011)

¹¹ Narnia is the fantasy world created by C.S. Lewis for his book series.

Raising the technical bar may, in some cases, discourage peer-produced content. IC’s media, however, places a strong emphasis on the ways members actively participate in helping to circulate their videos and messages. Sharing media becomes a primary activity for members and a source of their collective identity. In fact, it was IC members who actively circulated *KONY 2012* in the initial hours after its release.

While the HPA uses its production mostly for internal communication or communicating with partner groups (like the Nerdfighters), IC’s media aims at a wider, general audience, with production primarily in the hands of a professional team. With *KONY 2012*, they also further shifted the circulation to the rank-and-file members. While IC’s polished media elicits much pride in members, HPA’s more “amateur-style” production may encourage more conversation and participation.

Conventional Civic Practices Cluster

INFORM

This cluster includes practices that focus on the acquisition and sharing of information.

INFORM Practices
<i>Learn About Issues: Learn, and come to care about, social issues</i>
<i>Spread the Word: Inform others (both within and outside the group) about the organization, its causes, and the social issues it promotes</i>

Learn About Issues: Civic and political participation is often evaluated based on individuals’ political knowledge, as measured through “Civics-IQ” style tests. The more sophisticated measures consider knowledge about government, an understanding of democratic rules, and awareness of current events (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1996). By contrast, “learning about issues” as a civic practice refers to members’ self-reflection on how they learn—and come

to care—about social issues. We focus on what the members themselves feel is valuable, as opposed to pre-determining areas of knowledge. Such information becomes social and cultural currency within PCC organizations, yet some aspects of learning seem to be achieved more than others.

The HPA and IC differ in the scope of their engagement, requiring different approaches to building members' awareness of their concerns. IC focuses specifically on ending the use of

The “Learn About Issues” practice describes how members reflect on the processes of learning and caring about social issues.

child soldiers in the war in Uganda.¹² Still, some members feel baffled by the complexity of a war in a country that mainstream media almost never mentions. In her research on IC media, Lana Swartz (2012) commends IC's ability to create information that is

highly “spreadable”: “nuggets” of information that members master, and pass along to others. Most IC members, for example, can easily share information on how IC founders originally found out about the hardships of child soldiers. Yet, at the same time, Swartz found that IC has not encouraged and enabled members to dig down and deeply investigate issues. IC members' relative lack of “drillable” knowledge was evident as the group struggled to respond to critiques of their *KONY 2012* campaign, as we discuss more in the conclusion.

The HPA, in contrast, does not focus on a single issue, instead adopting a broad range of campaigns around literacy, equality, and human rights. For example, over the eight months between the releases of the last two Harry Potter movies, the organization embarked on seven campaigns, one a month, each on a different topic, from body image to child slavery. Each of these themes, all part of the “Deathly Hallows” campaign, might draw in new members based on

¹² This was IC's primary focus at the time of our research. The focus has now shifted to also include efforts to defeat and or arrest Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army.

their specific interest. Yet taken as a whole, they required long-time participants to educate themselves on many different topics, often forcing themselves out of their comfort zone:

“Bullying [the issue of one of the Deathly Hallows campaigns] is easy but like the fair trade [a campaign about fair trade chocolate] and everything, that’s hard. [...] We’re not from like a third world country, so we don’t know what that’s like.” (Maggie, HPA chapter member, 2/17/2011)

Members feel obligated to learn more about an issue when they are active in a campaign, particularly if they become part of the group’s outreach efforts, such as phone banking for the passing of marriage equality laws, collecting signatures on a petition to turn Warner Brother’s Harry Potter-themed chocolate fair trade, or registering people to vote. HPA leadership, in turn, supports members’ education by suggesting links to other information sources in their media, or setting up trainings for chapter organizers on how to educate members on issues.

Members in PCC organizations often connect their civic learning to their experiences with shared content worlds (for example, linking real-world injustices to incidents in the Harry Potter series). Anna explains how she made such connections:

I think starting to understand the stuff that I was reading too, not just at face value but symbolism, which, when you re-read Harry Potter after hitting a certain age I think you then start to understand that it’s pretty politically loaded. (Anna, HPA chapter organizer, 1/27/2011)

The HPA strengthens such links, for example, by calling real world concerns ‘horcruxes’ after parts of villain Voldemort’s soul that need to be destroyed, or comparing undocumented immigrants to Muggle-born children¹³.

IC’s own media productions – especially IC documentaries – offer the shared content worlds that members cite as powerful and resonant. IC adopts a media strategy that links the

¹³ Muggle-born children are those whose parents aren’t wizards, yet show magical powers. Some in the Wizarding World believe they are thus inferior, which the HPA suggests is a parallel for discrimination.

documentaries to other online content, a practice which Adam feels reinforced his understanding of the issues:

If you were to see a documentary and then go on the website and watch all the other smaller videos and like blogs and everything that they have, it's just like really supporting what you've already seen in the documentary and driving home what's happening. (Adam, IC club member, 3/19/2011)

PCC organizations build awareness as much through peer-to-peer discussion as through media production and circulation. Such social interactions allow participants to move from mastery of “dry facts” towards a shared understanding of the issues, one born from hearing multiple experiences and perspectives:

A lot of time it's just talking about issues and figuring out. Like, we've talked especially with the LGBT Horcrux and talking about providing equality and stuff like that. A lot of it is about actually finding a way to talk to people who don't know as much about the issue and educating them on that. (Kara, HPA staff member, 2/10/2011)

Such approaches are consistent with what Bennett, Wells and Rank (2009) claim about the different styles of civic learning under the dutiful and self-actualizing citizenship models. Learning for dutiful citizens comes from authoritative sources, where-as self-actualizing citizens favor interactive, project-based and peer-to-peer networked learning. Participants often seek to translate their understanding into participatory media creation. Members learned about and cared about issues more deeply when they could connect such concerns with powerful narratives and engage in ongoing discussions with their peers. Such practices help members confront the problem of ‘compassion fatigue’, the sense that there is just too much suffering in the world for anyone to confront, leading to reduced caring (see, e.g., Moeller, 1999).

However, such socialized and participatory learning does not always focus on the kinds of knowledge valued under traditional civic learning frameworks—especially electoral politics. In the interviews, HPA and IC members rarely linked their concerns to governmental solutions

and often expressed feelings of alienation from “politics as usual”. Importantly, it’s not that the organizations themselves shy from connections to politics. The HPA registers people to vote; IC advocated for President Obama to sign the Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009. Yet despite such explicitly political efforts, the young people we interviewed did not seem to have necessarily developed a greater understanding of how the political system worked.

Spread the Word: Whereas the previous practice referred to members’ own learning, PCC members often engage in informing those outside the group about the organization, its concerns

PCC organizations and members engage in the “Spread the Word” practice as they inform others about the organization and its activities, and relevant social issues.

and its efforts. In a study of immigrant rights groups in the Los Angeles area, Sasha Constanza-Chock (2010) notes a shift from top-down control of messaging towards a more dispersed commitment to getting word

out beyond the community. This shift is often accompanied by a movement from unified messaging towards an acceptance that different participants may frame the issues in different ways to reach the other communities in which they participate. Members may spread the word formally, through public speaking or media production and circulation, or informally, through their engagement in everyday conversations with friends and families. IC and HPA differ in the extent to which they seek to hone the communication skills of their members and in their relative emphasis on targeting outside audiences for their messages.

Invisible Children largely focuses on expanding the audience for their messages. One of the biggest challenges that local club members mention in regards to raising awareness is fear of public speaking:

The thing that’s hardest for me is public speaking. Like, if I’m starting to talk about how my day was, I’m totally fine. But sometimes, if I have to talk about

something more academic or if I'm really in charge of kind of like giving a lecture, that makes me more nervous. [...] And for me, how I kind of combatted my fear is really making sure I'm educated [...] just making sure I was very well informed, so that I would feel more confident about presenting the information to other people. (Stephanie, IC member, 3/2/2011)

While local club members have some opportunities to engage in public speaking, this practice is the ‘bread and butter’ for IC roadies. During their ten-week tour, IC roadies have around three screenings a day where they face live audiences. As Lara from the IC staff explains, the roadie program is unique in that “we send out our newest employees to be the face of our company”. (1/11/2011). Highly selective, the roadie training includes learning about the history of IC, its philosophy and the conflict in Uganda, as well as the practical skills needed on the road which include public speaking, selling merchandise, and basic accounting. In the training, public speaking is presented as an important civic skill, one that can be acquired and honed through practice and hard work:

Because the roadies’ job will be answering questions on stage, we start asking them questions as soon as they get here. We randomly select them [...] and then we’ll call them up and have them answer questions in front of the group. So they are getting more comfortable of talking in front of people, and learning how to develop answers for like on stage [...] So we do that every single day and twice a day, in the morning and the afternoon. (Lara, IC staff member, 1/25/2011)

IC helps participants to refine their skills as public speakers, but it also helps them to frame what they have learned in ways that can be translated into other contexts or valued at school or in the workplace. Members consistently said they were able to benefit from their experience with Invisible Children in other contexts, such as applying to college, a job, or working with other non-profit organizations.

Since the HPA participates in a wide range of causes, almost every campaign is accompanied by a period of learning about and finding new ways to talk about the new issue. In contrast to the public speaking opportunities created by IC, HPA members usually focus on peer-

to-peer discussions. Here again, the content world of Harry Potter often becomes a crucial tool:

It's funny to kind of start viewing the world through the HPA lens, but especially [...] with the Deathly Hallows campaign to take just everything, to take so many things that you come up with and just apply it to the real world setting, finding horcruxes to go out and fight in the real world, it kind of makes you look at everything differently. (Anna, HPA chapter organizer, 1/27/2011)

At the same time, the reliance on the content world may somewhat limit campaigns' inclusivity, excluding those who are not fans, or who do not share the same level of knowledge.

Like traditional civic organizations, PCC organizations often engage in spreading the word about their cause. Yet given the participatory nature of these organizations, many members are involved in raising awareness in ways that are often connected to the organizations' content worlds.

CONNECT

Practices in this cluster support communication with other group members and strategic networking with those outside the group.

CONNECT Practices

Connect Within the Group: Create, maintain and participate in structures that enable dialogue and exchange among group members

Network Beyond the group: Network with individuals and communities beyond the group to foster partnerships that further the organizations' goals

Connect Within the Group: As PCC organizations, both the HPA and IC invest much effort in creating and supporting internal structures of participation, dialogue and exchange. Growing out of participatory cultures, PCC organizations tend to be informally structured, generally refraining from clear hierarchies and offering many opportunities for flexible leadership. In addition, much of their internal communication occurs online. These circumstances place a high premium on establishing and maintaining open communication channels with dispersed group members. A focus on internal communication shapes both local

practices and enables day-to-day coordination within the national network. Leaders see time spent increasing social ties between members as meaningful to their group's effectiveness and

When PCC organizations and members connect with those “within the group”, they build and support internal structures of participation, dialogue and exchange.

sustainability.

Many communication needs are practical, namely scheduling meetings and organizing events. At the same time, PCC group members stress the importance of maintaining personal connection, especially for those

who see these organizations as an extension of their friendship-based networks:

A lot of our members they hang out outside of regular meetings or schedule social events, because we just like each other. We've learned to look for those personal connections so that it's more than just talking about Harry Potter. It's more than just volunteering at the shelter. It's about creating those relationships with people and having those people that you can depend on and trust. (Melissa, HPA chapter organizer, 1/24/2011)

PCC organizations consciously see themselves not only as groups with civic goals, but also as communities constituted on social relationships. Robert Putnam (2000) has argued that social activities, such as bowling leagues, helped to forge social capital in 1950s America, capital that could then be drawn upon by political organizations. IC and HPA combine those two functions within the same organizational structures, intensifying bonds among friends who share a common interest and tapping that social capital to inspire civic action.

Given what we now know about the importance of regular face-to-face contact to help sustain participation in dispersed digital networks over time, there is an added emphasis in PCC organizations on combining multiple forms of social contact. The young participants often demonstrate high levels of digital literacy. They use many online tools in their personal lives and are keenly aware of the affordances of online spaces. Still, our respondents recognize that using

these same online communication tools for the purpose of maintaining a civic group involves an ongoing process of learning, experimenting and adjusting.

HPA and IC use multiple new media tools—for a variety of purposes. Each tool, however, has its own benefits and limitations. Caitlin explains:

We love Skype and Google docs, that and email [...] that's how we function. Well, Livestream too, but that's for the bigger live streaming events, but really we communicate with each other through email, Skype, and Google Documents. That's how we keep track of everything. (Caitlin, HPA staff member, 9/19/2010)

Online platforms are evaluated based both on their ability to circulate centralized messages to dispersed members and to support many-to-many communication among networked participants. Facebook group pages, for example, enable all members to post messages, which they can use to share interests, some civic, some not. At the same time, we noted feelings of “technology overload” for some respondents. Namely, they worry that multiple tools *must* be used in order to gain minimal exposure:

You get 40 events in one day, and you're just not even going to open any of them. So we make sure that we have at least three or more ways of communication to make sure that people are exposed to it and at least conscious about what's happening. (Brian, IC member, 3/11/2011)

While this happens on the level of the local group, as in Brian's example, it is particularly evident for the national organization. In the HPA, for example, different teams of volunteers are constructed around different media tools for which they are responsible. Dana describes the HPA's different team configurations:

They have an admin team that just does all the maintenance with the passwords and blogs and all that. And then they have a writing team to write the blogs and different things and a Ning team just for our Ning group and the social networking team, which is actually going to change soon, and they have a LiveStream team that just deals with LiveStream... I'm missing teams.... [checks online] oh, Analytics that just deals with all the... like how many people are following us on twitter, how many people friended us on Facebook, how many people are going to our website. (Dana, HPA staff member, 8/15/2010)

The need to keep up with multiple tools thus also requires flexible organization. For example, newer tools like Twitter, Tumblr and vlogging require a continually expanding set of skills, and often, new organizational structures. These groups' improvisational and participatory structures (especially the ability to tap the diverse expertise of their members) allow them to quickly adapt to changes in the new media landscape in ways that are often difficult for more traditional groups.

PCC organizations merge fun social group contexts with civic goals, which can create potential challenges when others need to be 'nudged' to do their job. With relatively loose hierarchies, even group leaders cannot legitimately use their authority to convince others to take action:

The main thing is that you need to give them ownership. [...] You can't say "because" when you're a president, like, what makes me a president, right? (Kendra, IC club president, 3/17/2011)

On the other hand, informal hierarchies also enable horizontal (and bottom-up) learning. Sandra, an HPA staff member in charge of chapters, learned from the experience of chapter organizers she manages:

I've learned a lot about managing a staff and how you talk to someone about, you know, not doing quite what you've asked them to do, or how you talk to someone about not showing up. How you handle it when someone -- there is a week, I don't know, maybe in November there is like two weeks, where like, my entire staff was either sick or going through emotional stress or just like really busy and not around. And we had like six or seven things going on and I was just like, "Oh my God, where are you?" So, I'm kind of learning to take on that. I mean, I've learned a lot from my staff members too and I've learned a lot from our COs about what works and what doesn't. (Sandra, HPA staff member, 2/14/2011)

Building on a key characteristic of participatory cultures, in which everyone's contributions are seen as valuable, all members are encouraged to voice their suggestions and thoughts – both formally, for example in chapter organizers' meetings, and informally, on Twitter, Tumblr or

YouTube. In combination with their flexible organizational structure, such information flows allow the HPA to respond quickly to changing situations. For example, during the Deathly Hallows campaign discussed earlier, the HPA launched a different campaign every month. While chapters were expected to participate in these campaigns, they were often announced only very shortly before their launch, causing some frustration on the part of chapter organizers.

Responding to bottom-up communication, senior staff members at HPA changed their organizational structure to ensure that the head of chapters became a member of the senior staff team. In this way, chapters could be regularly informed about current activities, and senior staff had a more accurate sense of what goes on with local chapters.

IC clubs receive far less scaffolding from the national organization. IC builds on its local clubs to host and advertise roadie tours and to participate in fundraising initiatives. While these clubs maintain a high degree of autonomy from the central leadership, they also feel less included in the top-down decisions the group makes. Here, IC might learn from the HPA's greater focus on improving information flows between the chapters and the national organization. While IC has made a concerted effort to improve communication between headquarters and local clubs through programs like the Fourth Estate, they have not yet developed a process comparable to that of the HPA. Compared more generally to traditional civic organizations, both the HPA and IC pay much attention to inner-group communication, understood both as a means of dispersing information and maintaining social ties across the group. By building on both online and face-to-face communication, PCC organizations forge a participatory environment in which members feel heard and valued.

Network Beyond the Group: Networking with those outside the group describes the ways in which PCC organizations identify, establish and maintain strategic partnerships to further the

organizations' goals. PCC organizations do not seek to develop all of their capacities in house,

When PCC organizations and members connect with those “outside the group”, they network to establish and maintain strategic partnerships to further their goals.

but rather collaborate with other groups who can leverage their strengths and shore up their limits. In particular, the HPA has sought to forge strategic partnerships in the pursuit of its initiatives, working

across fandoms through its Imagine Better project¹⁴, and collaborating with nonprofit and NGOs around specific campaigns.

In IC, the local school-based clubs often connect to other groups within their home institutions. IC members often mentioned that they were involved in other college-based groups, and that their various involvements complemented each other. For example, while IC clubs were often new on campuses, members could draw support from older, more established groups. IC members also partner with other groups to publicize their screenings or to provide spaces where they could hold their events.

I was involved with Campus Crusade here and I talked to the director of Campus Crusade and I'm like, I'm trying to find a venue for us to have an Invisible Children screening, how do you guys go about it?... We ended up bringing in all the people who went to Campus Crusade and it was really amazing. (Adam, IC member, 3/19/2011)

IC also establishes strategic alliances with popular culture makers, in particular musicians who can connect the organization's mission with cultural content worlds. For example, Sofia used video production to invite the band Switchfoot, supporters of IC, to play at the Rescue event she organized in Kansas City:

Switchfoot has been one of my favorite bands in so long and I was like, to top it off, they're Invisible Children supporters. “Wait a second. Let's get them out to the Rescue.” So I was like, “All right. Well, I can't go to your show, so I'm going to force you guys to come to our event.” So we made these videos inviting people out and I

¹⁴ The HPA's new “Imagine Better project” aims to bring the ideas behind the Harry Potter Alliance—connecting fandom to civic engagement—to other fan communities.

personally made a video out to Switchfoot and I was like, "Listen. We need you guys to come rescue us and we would love to have you guys out there." [...] We get a response two days later [...] We're like, "Oh, my gosh. We are a community college. How is this happening? What is going on?" (Sofia, IC, 9/1/2011)

The HPA is very much an "alliance," investing time and effort into forging partnerships with other organizations. Some of the HPA's collaborators are traditional non-profit organizations, such as STAND, the student-led division of United to End Genocide; Partners in Health who provide health care in developing countries; and Splashlife, an environmental advocacy group. Through these collaborations, the HPA benefited from the skill-sets and on-the-ground connections that traditional non-profits brought, and which the HPA lacked as a newer, more informal organization. For example, HPA used the \$123,000 it raised through its Helping Haiti Heal campaign to partner with Partners in Health to send five planes with medical supplies to the devastated area in 2009. The planes were named Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Dumbledore, after favorite characters from the series, with the fifth plane named DFTBA (acronym for Don't Forget to Be Awesome) to recognize the contribution of the Nerdfighter community. For HPA members, the connections with non-profit organizations expands their knowledge and awareness:

I have learned about issues and about different organizations, people like Partners In Health who we helped out with during Helping Haiti Heal that I did not know about before.... (Anna, HPA chapter organizer, 1/27/2011)

The HPA also partners with others in the Harry Potter fandom. Fan conventions, Quiddich tournaments, and wizard rock performances are all employed to recruit members and engage them in action. Sam, for example, is a captain of a college Quidditch team, but is not a member of the HPA. Still, he values the HPA's partnership with the International Quidditch Association (the IQA):

I'm glad that the IQA especially associated themselves with the HPA because it sounds like they have a lot of the same audience and if the IQA already has people, it sounds like the Harry Potter Alliance can definitely draw people from quidditch to help them out [...] the IQA can transition people into that. (Sam, IQA member, 4/8/2011)

The PCC organizations have come to recognize that they cannot do everything by themselves; they are learning to leverage the capacities of larger networks and to form tactical partnerships with other groups around specific campaigns. In doing so, they recognize and respond to their own limits, as well as the strength in diversity that comes from outside collaborations. Here, networking connects with a key characteristic of participatory cultures: harnessing the collective intelligence of the group. By accessing members' differential skills, participatory cultures can leverage their combined expertise, reaching far beyond individuals' skills and capabilities (Jenkins et al., 2006). While IC engaged in networking mostly in the traditional sense of partnering with other on-campus organizations or booking screenings in local communities, the HPA is characterized by a more out-of-the-box approach, where the HPA joins forces with other parties, often for short term campaigns, which strengthens the mission of both sides.

ORGANIZE AND MOBILIZE

Practices in this cluster build structures to scaffold and motivate members towards sustained civic action.

ORGANIZE AND MOBILIZE Practices

Organize: *Create and sustain organizational, logistical and operational dimensions of setting up, recruiting for and running local chapters and clubs*

Mobilize: *Motivate and engage yourself and others towards episodic and sustained collective action*

Organize: The “organize” practice refers to logistical and operational dimensions of setting up, recruiting for, and running local chapters and clubs. It also includes coordination between participants in a network that often involves centralized leadership and decentralized activity. While all civic groups need to “organize” if they are going to effect change, PCC groups’

flexible membership structures and peer-to-peer support networks, building on practices of participatory culture, add an important dimension to these activities.

The “organize” practice refers to the logistical and operational dimensions of setting up, recruiting and running local chapters and clubs.

Both IC and HPA have generated a participatory support network that is both vertical (organizational driven) and horizontal (peer-to-peer). The HPA, for example, actively supports new chapter organizers:

The way that our chapters program now works is that it is about half leadership training and support, and half education and support. There is a lot of support in there through phone conferences and online systems. First of all, this is new and it can be hard for people to come into a new leadership position and trying to get things organized, and also because what we do is so different that sometimes you really need to sit down and have a conversation about, how do we explain the Harry Potter Alliance effectively to your faculty advisor, how do you explain it to your parents, how do you explain it to your best friend? (Catherine, HPA staff member, 9/27/2011)

Anyone who expresses an interest in setting up a new chapter is sent an information package, receives periodical updates from the organization, and is required to answer weekly questions posed by the organization. In addition, the HPA lists all registered chapters on its website, providing additional visibility and recognition. Though they receive organizational support, local HPA and IC groups have freedom in running their operations, for example, initiating their own activities based on members’ preferences.

Both IC clubs and HPA chapters apply flexible membership structures; members choose how involved they want to be. In some cases, being a member means keeping up with the group’s activities online through the group’s Facebook page and joining activities when it is possible. This flexibility is particularly important given young members’ varied circumstances: they may have obligations around high school, college or work; transportation may be an issue, especially for members who don’t yet drive or don’t own a car. Flexible membership

requirements allow these groups to expand their latent capacity, connecting with more casual participants who may be drawn into a particular action or campaign. Most of the organizers plan their activities to accommodate members' fluctuating degrees of involvement:

When we are doing fundraisers we obviously need club member support and people to come out. But then in the spring when it's more awareness and stuff, we don't require as much time really. It's really just we kind of hang out once a week and meetings are a lot more like... I guess they're more relaxed. A couple of weeks ago we did it, we had a dinner for our meeting. (Jake, IC, 03/17/2011)

While these groups welcome casual members, local group leaders distinguish between occasional and committed participation. Overall, they feel that a dedicated core of regular participants keeps the group going. A local group without a stable core may not survive. Yet even with stable cores, fluctuation in attendance and participation creates some ongoing struggles for continuity and coherence.

For instance, many of the HPA chapters we studied are community based, rather than tied to an academic institution. Members of community chapters may live further away from each other and often have incompatible schedules due to different work places. As HPA chapters sometimes have trouble sustaining face-to-face meetings, they rely heavily on online structures. One local leader organized regular conference calls among her peers, sharing strategies for overcoming the unique challenges of leading a community chapter.

These challenges resemble those confronting traditional organizations: finding times and places to meet, scheduling activities, working with the national organization. Yet in PCC organizations, organizing takes particular forms. Building on ideals of participatory culture, PCC organizations enable flexible membership, where each participant participates as much as they can and want. This distinguishes PCC organizations from the more rigid membership

requirements of some traditional civic organizations¹⁵. Interviewees mention experiences with traditional organizations where they had to drop out because they couldn't attend the required number of meetings. At the same time, flexible membership raises its own challenges for PCC organizations, particularly in creating continuity.

Mobilize: The “mobilize” practice refers to the ways in which PCC organizations and their members motivate and generate short- and long-term collective action. As their most visible actions suggest, these organizations can activate many participants very quickly. Such short-term spurts of activity, however, build on the long-term nurturing of a base of active members.

PCC organizations often engage in campaigns that call for rapid and focused action from many people. *KONY 2012* is a particularly visible example in this respect. The video was circulated, peer-to-peer, to an immensely large public, most of which had never heard of Invisible Children before. These large publics were asked to take action “right now” by signing a pledge, getting a bracelet and action kit, donating a few dollars, and above all, by sharing the film. Yet while many of these casual viewers shared the video, a Twitter analysis conducted by Gilad Lotan (2012) shows that one of the key factors accounting for the video's astounding spread were networks of pre-existing supporters of Invisible Children, much like the ones interviewed in our study.

The Harry Potter Alliance has shown similar examples of short-term mobilization, though on a much smaller scale. When the HPA participated in the Chase Community Giving competition in 2010, they needed to gather votes on Facebook.¹⁶ Gearing up, existing staff members committed themselves to reach out to as many potential supporters as possible, asking

¹⁵ For example, members of “Key Club”, an organization that was often mentioned in our interviews, are “expected to do at least 50 service hours per year”. See www.keyclub.org

¹⁶ As previously noted, Invisible Children also won this same competition in 2009.

them to vote for the HPA. The short-term mobilization thus depended on the dedication of existing supporters and their willingness to tap their networks:

One thing that we also stressed was, if you vote, can you think of three other people who might be interested in voting and write them? We were one of the organizations that were on top of this from the beginning and I think that helped us. There was this huge push to go viral towards the end but I think that was because of all the work that had gone in beforehand. I know that there are people that I contacted three or four times asking them to do just one more thing... So I think it comes down to mere persistence. (Catherine, HPA staff member, 8/12/2010)

Short-term mobilizations also allow PCC organizations to reach new potential supporters outside their immediate community. The Chase Community Giving competition, for example, led to a jump in new chapter requests for the HPA, which in turn, significantly boosted membership.

Our argument—that the mobilization of large publics hinges on the devoted action of existing members—also responds to the “slacktivism” critique, which claims that social action online is easy to do, and thus banal¹⁷. While a broader public may have only shared the IC video online, or voted for the HPA on Facebook without engaging more deeply, it was the dedicated work of existing members that made this activity possible.

We thus now turn our attention to the way that PCC organizations keep their member base engaged. This is an important challenge for PCC organizations, similarly to

The “Mobilize” practice refers to how PCC organizations motivate and engage their members and others to act.

the one that traditional civic organizations are facing nowadays. But, unlike more traditional organizations, PCC organizations respond by defining civic action as something that is fun,

¹⁷ For a prominent example of this critique, see Gladwell, 2010.

social and playful. Both IC and HPA members acknowledge this approach as resonating with them:

That's kind of the whole plan of the HPA, is that you've got fun with Harry Potter and that's what encourages people to do charitable things that they might not otherwise do. (Camilia, HPA chapter organizer, 3/15/2011)

[IC] almost turned advocacy [...] into pop culture. I mean, not so much into like, "Oh this is fun, let's do this", but people identified with it more and something that's possible and something that they can relate to and something that they want to be involved with. (Dan, IC intern, 7/15/2010)

HPA and IC connect social action and enjoyment in all everyday activities. For example, Melissa, an HPA chapter organizer, tries to address low attendance rates at meetings by making her HPA chapter a fun place to be where everyone feels like they belong (a characteristic of participatory cultures):

I was trying to come up with both the entertaining aspect that made people feel like this is fun, it's relaxing, it's a place they want to be, and that feeling that we need you to be successful. We need you to participate and we need your insights on some of the issues [...] if you have more of a background in it than the rest of us, we need your voice. (Melissa, HPA chapter organizer, 1/24/2011)

Chapter organizers also seek to break collective action down to concrete, actionable steps. Many chapter organizers find that the best attended meetings are ones that involve a concrete voluntary activity, such as packing up books for donations, filling candy gift bags for orphans, or registering voters at a wizard rock concert. PCC organizations give members the sense of active participation by giving them focused instructions on what it is they can do (similar to the ones suggested at the end of the *KONY 2012* video). This tactic helps address young people's common feeling that social problems are too complex for them to handle.

"I just hone that ability to go, "This is what's going on, this is what's happening and guess what? You can do something." (Virginia, HPA chapter organizer, 1/13/2011)

To those unfamiliar with PCC organizations, the slacktivism critique becomes an easy explanation for campaigns similar to *KONY 2012*, in which large publics are asked (and,

sometimes, agree) to engage in focused, short-term collective action. Yet, the visibility and success of such campaigns could not be achieved without the dedication of more involved members whose participation has been actively sustained over a longer period of time.

Concluding Thoughts

Building on the work of Foot & Schneider (2002), Earl and Kimport (2011, p. 13) propose a distinction between “scale- changing” and “model-changing” impacts of new media on political and civic organizations. They use “scale changing” to refer to cases where the internet accentuates or accelerates pre-existing practices, and “model changing” to refer to effects where networked practices create new dynamics and logics. Our approach to PCC groups does not focus exclusively on new media technologies. But, borrowing Earl & Kimport’s terminology, we see the kinds of participatory politics represented by IC and HPA as “model-changing civic practices”.

Building on structures and practices of participatory culture, PCC organizations invest time, thought and energy into creating civic engagement that is *actually engaging* for young people. They are conducting politics through a new language and through a different set of practices than more traditional organizations, and they are forging stronger links between young people’s emerging civic identities and who they are in their everyday involvement in friendship-driven and interest-driven networks. The civic practices we identified here demonstrate the civic effects of membership in IC and HPA, as well as point to things other groups might learn from their model. PCC groups embody participatory culture in distinctive ways through their efforts to establish community ties and expand members’ capacities for storytelling and media production. The second set of practices discussed—inform, organize and mobilize, and connect—are practices these groups share with more “traditional” civic organizations. Yet, these practices take

on particular dimensions within PCC organizations. Together, the practices provide members with a rich repertoire for civic action and ongoing opportunities for civic learning that are experiential and rewarding. Some of this learning grows organically out of meaningful participation in the group's activities, where-as other kinds of learning are built consciously into these groups, which are both very aware of their potential role in civic education, as well as civic action. These groups seek to tap into the desire for fun, sociality, affect and creative expression in order to motivate deeper commitments to civic agendas.

Though we found the HPA and IC cultivated similar civic practices among their members, we also identified a key difference between them: IC members were generally more experienced and better versed in conveying their abilities to those outside the organization. Participation in the organization equipped them with a bridging vocabulary that helped them explain the value of what they had learned. HPA members, on the other hand, were less ready to articulate their experiences as mastered civic skills in a way that clearly resonates beyond fandom.

We believe this difference stems partially from the organizations' different positions on the previously mentioned difference between "inward-facing" and "outward-facing" civic expression. While generally interested in increasing its membership, the HPA has historically seen Harry Potter fandom as its main recruitment base and less frequently speaks to wide, general audiences.¹⁸ Members are thus often used to speaking a language that is more easily comprehensible inside fandom (for example, metaphors from the content world), and have less experience in portraying their organization and experiences to "outsiders". While these tactics are valuable in helping young people to connect activism to their interests as fans, they may

¹⁸ This is increasingly changing with the HPA's new Imagine Better project. It will be interesting how these developments shape the "outward-facing" side of the HPA/Imagine Better.

hamper opportunities for partnership and connected learning in more “outward facing” contexts. IC’s central goal is fundraising and raising public awareness about the war in Africa. For this reason, IC constantly reaches out to new audiences, a practice that is particularly exemplified in screenings. IC thus places a strong emphasis on developing succinct, and at times even simplistic, messages and creating professionally polished media. IC staff also train their dedicated supporters to personalize and convey these messages to others. In our research, IC members were typically more able to build on their experience with IC in applying to college or for a position at other non-profits.

At the same time, the events surrounding IC’s release of *KONY 2012* revealed the limitations of IC’s “outward facing” abilities. On the one hand, the film’s incredible “spreadability” was a testimony to IC’s ability to speak to a much wider public than previously imagined. On the other hand, the criticisms directed at *KONY 2012* challenged members, often forcing them to adopt new practices. For example, while IC members were usually well-versed in spreading the word, they sometimes had difficulty moving beyond the official story told by the organization and usually did not critique its representation of events and issues. In the days following *KONY 2012*, we observed highly engaged IC members forced to “drill deep” to respond to difficult questions concerning the campaign. Collaborating with each other and often without support from the organization’s leadership, IC members struggled to research questions concerning IC’s relations to the religious right or its stand on gay rights. They then used social media to share their findings with each other.

IC members’ struggles around *KONY 2012* call attention to an additional civic practice, which seems largely absent within IC and perhaps other PCC organizations -- “rebuttal”, or defending your own position in the face of opposition. In more traditional political organizations,

members are socialized to perceive their position as opposed to another political party. In internal discussions, members may discuss counter-arguments to their position, and learn how to defend their beliefs, ferociously if needed. The HPA and IC tend to operate differently. These organizations rely on community relations, friendship and fun. They thrive in environments that are generally perceived as supportive and welcoming. Members tend to offer polite feedback, not sharp critique. They often try to avoid discord. These characteristics are part of what makes PCC organizations so inviting and hospitable to young people. At the same time, IC should have anticipated some of the criticism it received, yet it failed to prepare its rank and file to respond to the push-back on its *KONY 2012* campaign. Their training in personal and collective storytelling, say, had not given them the background they needed to engage in the less consensual political debate. Moving forward, we suggest these organizations may have to consider how to cultivate this ability, while at the same time maintaining the warm environment that usually renders it unnecessary.

In closing, we return to the YPP Network's evolving notion of "participatory politics", as mentioned in the introduction, and its possible connections to PCC. The YPP Network perceives participatory politics as providing opportunities for young people to: "reach large audiences and mobilize networks", "help shape agendas through dialogues with and feedback to political leaders," "influence exposure to news through circulation of information," and "exert greater agency through the production of original content" (Cohen & Kahne 2012, p. 3).¹⁹ Some of the PCC practices identified through this research may directly connect to some of these dimensions of YPP's participatory politics concept. For instance, the "Create" practices cluster may map onto YPP's production. The "Mobilize/Organize" cluster may correspond to some dimensions of

¹⁹ The YPP Network is currently further developing this definition of participatory politics.

what YPP calls mobilization. And, the “Inform” cluster of practices resonates with YPP’s notions of circulation and dialogue. At the same time, we recognize there is more work to be done in positing the relations between PCC and participatory politics. For example, where do our “Connect” practices fit within the current YPP formulation of participatory politics? We plan to continue to explore these and other questions in our continued work with the YPP network.

We end our report with a more practical question: How may more traditional organizations adopt and learn from the successful practices of PCC organizations? Our analysis suggests that young people engage and mobilize when they can link civic activities to other interests. Returning to our three components of experience, the links forged between traditionally accepted civic goals (“wish to help”) and experiences more closely associated with participatory culture (“shared media experiences” and “sense of community”) provide important insights into how PCC organizations mobilize youth to care about, and take action around, civic issues. The civic practices we identify become opportunities for civic learning. They also clearly point to the central role that media, especially new media, plays in these contexts. As PCC organizations, both the HPA and IC actively cultivate this media-centric learning through informal and formal structures based in participatory culture. More traditional organizations may look to these practices and structures as tools to engage youth in ways that genuinely value their interests, their communities, and their participation.

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