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This 2012 edition is the inaugural publication of the *Ripon College Journal of Ethics and Communication*. For many years, the seniors of the Communication Department conducted a youth summit to bring young people together to discuss issues such as ethics, communication and the environment. This year, instead of bringing high school students to Ripon College, we're bringing ourselves to high schools via an electronic journal. The theme of this year's journal is “Ethics, Communication and Engaging Youth in a Democratic Society.” It is our hope that this journal will prompt discussion, spark ideas, and inspire students to take a more active role in their communities and the world.

This project would not be possible without the help of several people. First, we would like to thank Dr. J. Michael Hogan, the Director of the Center for Democratic Deliberation at The Pennsylvania State University, whose work on engaging youth voices is an inspiration for this journal and for us. Second, we would like to acknowledge Mrs. Susan Brockmann, a Communication teacher at Merrill High School in Merrill, Wisconsin, for her feedback and guidance in the creation of this journal. We would also like to thank Ric Damm, Director of Publications and Institutional Image at Ripon College, for his help with the graphic design of the journal. Finally, our class would like to thank Dr. Jody Roy, Chair of the Communication Department at Ripon College. Jody has served as our advisor, both on this project and throughout our time at Ripon College.

Thank you,
Ripon College Communication Department, Class of 2012
Preface to the Ripon Journal of Ethics and Communication
J. Michael Hogan, Ph.D.

In 1936, journalist Maxine Davis traveled around the US talking to young people. The result was a book entitled *The Lost Generation: A Portrait of American Young People*. Davis criticized the youth of her day for being self-absorbed and disengaged, complaining about their “complete nihilism” and “vegetable passivity.” Today we hear similar complaints, of course. Every day we read news stories about the apathy or even narcissism of young people. Yet while those stories make news, the vast majority of high school and college students are hard at work, doing well in school, and making positive contributions to their communities. Too bad we don’t hear more about those young people.

It is true that today’s young people are not as involved in traditional forms of political activity as their parents. Since the voting age lowered from 21 to 18 in 1971, there has been a steady decline in the number of young people who vote. Youth voting was up in the 2008 election, yet even in this so-called “year of the young voter” fewer than half of the eligible voters between 18 and 24 showed up at the polls, and barely a quarter of eligible young voters typically turn out in midterm elections. Voting, however, is not the only way young people “get involved” in our democracy. Many young people volunteer to help others in their communities or make political “statements” with their consumer choices, buying or boycotting products for political reasons. Others become involved with groups that promote environmental causes, social or political reforms, or world peace.

At a conference on youth politics held in Racine, Wisconsin in 2001, a group of student leaders from across the nation acknowledged that they were “disillusioned with conventional politics.” Yet they went on to say, “we are deeply involved in civic issues through non-traditional forms of engagement. We are neither apathetic nor disengaged.” In other words, these young people were not disengaged but differently engaged. And who can blame them? The partisan bickering and political gridlock of “politics-as-usual” understandably turns off many young people. Not only do they find such politics distasteful, but many feel that they can do more good by working with charitable groups in their own communities or by supporting political or social causes with their time and money. There is much to be said for this more personal and direct sort of civic engagement. In the end, however, politics do matter, so I conclude with a plea.

We need more young people in politics! We need you to vote. But more than that, we need to hear your voice. You bring fresh ideas to the table. You are more tolerant and open-minded—more willing to consider new ways of doing things. You have little patience for the “game” of politics. You expect our elected officials to work together to get things done, and you’re not afraid to say “enough is enough”: Enough of the mudslinging and negative campaigning! Enough of the partisan bickering! Whatever your political views or affiliations, you have the power to make a difference! So, please, get involved!

J. Michael Hogan is a Liberal Arts Research Professor and Director of the Center for Democratic Deliberation at The Pennsylvania State University. He has authored multiple books on American public address and civic engagement, including *The Nuclear Freeze Campaign* and *The Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address* and is co-author of *Public Speaking and Civic Engagement*, a textbook used in high school and collegiate courses across the nation.
Access Denied: Internet Filters in High Schools and Libraries
Breena Brockmann

Google has replaced the Encyclopedia, Dictionary.com is the new Webster's, Facebook made pen pals instantaneous, and MapQuest made atlases obsolete. The Internet is a valuable resource, but it can also be dangerous, which is why many schools try to control students’ access to online content. Deciding what websites to block at a high school or public library is a complicated question. While there are some sites that obviously should not be visited while at school, other sites are difficult to categorize. For example, while YouTube could be used to watch hours of funny cat videos, it can also show the most recent presidential speech or a video of a college lecture. Through Internet filters, schools and libraries may be preventing students from accessing valuable information. Some students have begun to raise awareness of the problem of deciding which websites to filter by participating in the first-ever Banned Website Awareness Day, which was held on September 28, 2011.¹ In order to understand the goals of these students, and how Internet filters affect access to information, I will first explain the process of Internet filtering, then analyze the events of the Banned Website Awareness Day, before finally discussing the future of Internet filters.

The Process of Internet Filtering

The Internet is filtered in high schools due to the CIPA or Children Internet Protection Act, which was passed in 2001 and requires that filters be put in place so that minors cannot access online material that is obscene or harmful. If schools and libraries meet these guidelines, they are given Internet funding assistance by the government.² However, it is up to the high

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**Breena Brockmann** is from Merrill, WI, graduating with a double major in Communication and Politics & Government, as well as a minor in National Security Studies. In August, 2012, Breena will enter graduate school at the University of Georgia where she will continue her study of Communication.
school itself to decide what sites are considered inappropriate and how to block them. Since it is impossible for schools to block every individual site that contains questionable content, schools buy programs that allow the school to block sites based on keywords. A filter program will search a website, and if the page contains words that are on a list of unacceptable words, the site will be blocked. While this process prevents sites that are dangerous from being accessed by students, it also blocks some useful websites. For example, CYBERsitter, one of many filter programs, blocked content on the Amnesty International news page because of the phrase “over 21,” which is usually associated with alcohol use. The site was not referring to alcohol but was instead a story about an event in Indonesia that killed “over 21 people.”

The process of blocking sites by keyword can create situations that prevent students from having access to legitimate information and political resources. Without information on all sides of a political issue, it is difficult to be an engaged citizen. There are several examples of school Internet filters blocking important political content from students. For example, SurfWatch blocked the website of House Majority Leader Richard Armey because it detected his nickname “Dick” on the site. Another filter program, SmartFilter, blocked the Declaration of Independence and “Marijuana: Facts for Teens,” a brochure published by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The problem with these filters is that they block sites based on single words instead of the context in which they are used. So, while it may make sense to limit a student’s access to sites advocating drug use, there is no way to do this without blocking helpful sites in the process.

To some students these restrictions are a problem that could easily be avoided by doing research at home or on an Internet-enabled device, like a smart phone; however, this is not an option for all students. Some students do not have access to the Internet outside of schools and public libraries, making it impossible for these students to have equal access to information. Lynn Sutton, director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University in North Carolina and author of a study on Internet use in high schools, explained, "[w]hen you have a digital
divide, some kids only have filtered access from school on a wide variety of issues - from abortion, to sex education, to world history. The real problem is that the school is only letting through one view of society that the school deems appropriate for children to see." This means that students who are not lucky enough to have Internet at home are at a disadvantage and may be limited in their ability to be engaged citizens.

**Participation in Banned Website Awareness Day**

Students, librarians, and teachers realize that the information gap between students who only have the censored Internet of high schools and libraries and those who have full access at home will only continue to widen. In order to prevent this inequality, schools have begun to speak out by participating in the first Banned Website Awareness Day which was held on September 28, 2011. This day was sponsored by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and was part of Banned Book Week. There were several different tactics used on Banned Website Awareness Day to protest Internet filtering. Some of these tactics were direct and others were more symbolic.

One example of a direct response took place at Middle School 127 in the Bronx, where students spent the day writing emails to the Department of Education to express their concern with the role of Internet filters in their school. Specifically, this school took up the issue of getting personal blogs and social media sites unblocked. Devon Black, a librarian at School 127, summed up the reason for this request saying, “[o]ur job is to teach students the safe use of the Internet. And it’s hard to do that if we can’t get to the sites." This is one of the primary arguments made against Internet filters. Many teachers argue that the Internet should be a teaching opportunity, and that by blocking sites, teachers are prevented from teaching their students valuable life skills. This type of response is a very overt attempt to change the Internet filtering system. By going directly to the source of the regulations, the Department of Education, schools that used a direct
approach on Banned Website Awareness Day ensured that their complaints had the potential to be heard.

Some schools chose to take a more symbolic approach to participating in Banned Website Awareness Day. Unlike the more direct responses, which tried to reason with the organizations that would have the power to change the Internet filtering system, the symbolic approach functioned as protest instead of argumentation. One example of an indirect approach to participating in Banned Website Awareness Day took place in Longmont, Colorado, at Silver Creek High School. Phil Goerner, the school’s librarian, organized a graffiti debate in which sheets of white paper were hung up in the cafeteria and students were asked to create pro and con lists for online filtering. This protest was intended to remind the students participating, as well as anyone who saw the posters, that censorship has the ability to take away people’s voices. By allowing students to say whatever they like publicly, the actions of Silver Creek High School students functioned as a protest against the idea of censorship.

Another symbolic approach to Banned Website Awareness Day was created by New Cannon High School in Connecticut. This school, which has a fairly open Internet policy, made the decision to cut off access to sites like Facebook and Twitter for the day in order to show solidarity with students who are always prevented from visiting these sites. Michael DeMattia, a senior, explained how difficult it was not being able to bring up a YouTube video for a presentation, or log on to Facebook to collaborate with other students. Michael then added, “[the Internet] made cooperation and collaboration inside and outside of class much better and faster. It really has become an integral part of education.” The idea of denying oneself something, be it food or Facebook, as a form of protest is a very common technique and has been used in national movements, such as suffragettes going on a hunger strike when they were jailed for picketing in front of the White House. The intentional blocking of some websites to show support for other schools is a perfect example of this type of protest.
Both the direct and symbolic approaches were combined to bring attention to the issue of website filtering in high schools. Carl Harvey, AASL’s president, summed up the overall argument of Banned Website Awareness Day by saying, "Relying solely on filters does not teach young citizens how to be savvy searchers or how to evaluate the accuracy of information." Students proved that they possessed the reasoning and understanding necessary to appreciate the benefits and drawbacks of Internet filters by participating in Banned Website Awareness Day through both direct pleas for greater transparency and symbolic acts of protest.

The Future of Internet Filters

While a completely unrestricted Internet in high schools and libraries is not an option, or perhaps not even a good idea, a drastically more accessible Internet is feasible. One example of this can be found in Wisconsin. In July, 2010, Tim Peltz, the technology director of the Racine Unified School District, removed almost all Internet filters. The only sites that remained blocked were those with sexual content or extreme views, such as gang websites, the only types of sites that the CIPA specifically says must be blocked. While Peltz says the change was initially met with resistance, he persisted, saying, “The Internet is a right, whereas previously it was seen as a privilege. If you take the Internet away, it’s kind of like saying, 'You can’t have this textbook.'”

So far there have only been minor glitches with this lack of restriction, all of which have been quickly handled. Racine is an excellent example of students, faculty, and the technology department working together to provide students the most unbiased and useful information possible.

The Internet is an ever-changing resource and it is, therefore, challenging for schools to keep up with what students need to access in order to complete their schoolwork to the best of their ability and to remain informed on the world around them. This is not the first time that schools and libraries have had to make decisions on what resources should be available to minors. We now routinely read books that used to be banned and study topics that once were kept
It is important that today's students have access to important issues such as politics, history, health information, and current events. The only way to do this is to reexamine the role of Internet restrictions. By looking at the persuasive techniques used during Banned Website Awareness Day, it is clear that this is an issue that students care about and will continue to pursue.

Comprehension Questions:

1. How do filter programs work? What sorts of sites are blocked?
2. What Is Banned Website Awareness Day?
3. What are two types of protest used on Banned Website Awareness Day?

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the pros and cons of Internet filters?
2. How do Internet restrictions impact your ability to do research?
3. What is your school's Internet filtering policy?
4. What can students do in your school to alter the established Internet filter guidelines?

Is there a process to request a site be unblocked?

5 Ibid.
6 Sutton, “Overzealous Filters Hinder Research”
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
The New Democracy: Civic Engagement on the Internet
Jeremy Johnson

Throughout my childhood and my teenage years, I spent hours on the web every day. I usually watched videos, talked with friends on social networking sites, played video games, and took part in discussions on Internet message boards. Being interested in politics and our society, having the web as an outlet for my voice was incredibly empowering for me, especially since engaging in politics is often difficult and intimidating for young people. My experiences online allowed me to hear others’ perspectives, formulate my own opinions, and even debate the issues with other people. As a teenager, I wanted to challenge adults and be engaged in the process.

When the Internet came about, many scholars believed experiences like mine would become the norm in the future; they saw the web as an equalizer of sorts, giving voices to people who never before were able to engage in the political process. Since then, academic research has focused on how the Internet impacts our political sphere, with a few perspectives emerging. Researchers have many different answers to the fundamental question: is political engagement on the web helpful? The advantages and disadvantages to online engagement shape how we view the web in relation to politics. To better understand the advantages and disadvantages, let’s consider a few arguments about online political engagement.

The first argument is that the Internet is helpful; people in this camp point to experiences like mine and argue that a digital voice, one with which people can deliberate on the politics of society, is a democratizing factor, meaning that more citizens are able to engage in a government “by the people and for the people.” Two researchers who studied Facebook found that “Facebook

Jeremy Johnson hails from Colorado Springs, CO. He is a double major in Communication and Politics & Government. He will be entering graduate studies in Communication Arts and Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University in the fall of 2012.
and other social networking sites have created new ways to bridge the gap between users through groundbreaking interactive technologies which we show foster political participation among members. For example, youth are now able to Tweet politicians, attend virtual town hall meetings, and share political links with their friends. Other studies have been conducted to understand the web’s impacts on political participation, some of them focusing on the link between online participation and offline or face-to-face participation. One study found that those who read news online were both engaged in online discussion and offline activism about the war in Iraq; the authors argue that the web is effective at creating public sphere discussion and even mobilizing people to engage in face-to-face activism.

Others argue that the Internet mostly reflects the social structures already present in society. This camp highlights the likelihood of people to stay within their social groups and to behave online in the same manner they behave offline. These authors would likely assert that some youth would be engaged in political discussions, regardless of online outlets; they might also suggest that a digital voice, on a whole, has no more power than one would when chatting with friends over lunch at school. The book, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, explores this concept at length, finding that online structures, such as Google’s search results system and online blogging, tend to reinforce traditional political structures. The book suggests that while anyone may post to Twitter or Facebook, that does not necessarily mean other people will listen, much like no audience is guaranteed in person. For example, political leaders will still have a larger audience and more sway on Twitter than the “Average Joe” does.

The other primary argument is that online participation is helpful, but only when combined with offline action. Online discussion, on its own, is viewed as relatively ineffective. People arguing from this perspective would likely point to developments like the recent protests in the Middle East, where digital communication, including cell phones, text messaging, and online organizing through services like Twitter, have contributed significantly to protests and face-to-face
activism. Without the Internet, protests like those in Egypt very well may not have been successful. One author studied youth activism in European politics in relation to online participation and found that indifference could be reversed through a combination of online discussion and offline activism. The other distinction is with the type of online engagement; one study found that those who participated in online message boards were more likely to become politically active than those who simply talked about politics on Facebook.

In general, online activism and participation have a number of advantages, the first of which is youth engagement in the political process. In the past, youth were one of the least-represented groups in political elections; the calls of apathy and indifference have, historically, shaped the way we think of young people and politics. Today’s research, focusing on the Internet, has shown a potential reverse in that trend, with young people engaging on Facebook, Twitter, message boards, and more. As politicians have become more active on the Internet, their connections with youth are growing. The 2008 election had the second largest youth turnout in American history, attributed by many to the rise in Internet engagement. As society becomes more connected, reading more news online and hearing about political issues, it is easier for everyone to get involved, including the youth; knowing that, one author writes, “[t]he Net Generation . . . is ready to lead and govern.” That those who use the Internet the most may become empowered by its potential is not surprising, but is, to many, a sign of hope for the future of political engagement.

The web may also open discussion on important issues in society, providing new perspectives. Controversial opinions can crop up online; with the help of anonymity, people are generally less afraid of expressing ideas that otherwise may not be acceptable in the offline public sphere. We also tend to hear opinions that we may otherwise ignore; according to one study, “‘open source’ spaces for dialog on the internet can, and probably do, collect minds with a range of policy preferences and ideological groundings—and they talk to each other.” This is
considered to be a benefit; in an age where people can tune into 24-hour television networks that largely reinforce their beliefs, hearing other perspectives is healthy. The diversity of voices on the Internet, masked by anonymity, can be expressed and will likely be heard. Further research found that online communities have wide and deep discussions, meaning more voices and more in-depth deliberation.\(^8\) On Facebook and Twitter, we may choose to add or follow friends with differing political perspectives; while it is possible to ignore these people, we often read through their posts, regardless of whether we disagree with the sentiment. Online discussion forces us to consider more ideas, democratizing the process by giving voices to those who previously lacked them.

Online discussion may not just change what we talk about, but also how we talk about it. Offline, certain groups and people are often able to steer discussions, cementing their opinions and shutting others out. Online, the picture may be quite different: “[s]tudies demonstrate that online discussions are generally much more egalitarian [equal] than face-to-face encounters, with reduced patterns of individual dominance and increased contributions by low-status participants.”\(^9\) Basically, people who might be ignored in face-to-face meetings are given equal time online; individual people are not dominating discussions and making decisions. One concept, the “spiral of silence,” suggests that people are silenced by another group; later, the silenced decide not to try to voice themselves because they fear they will be silenced anyway. One study found that this phenomenon is less frequent on the web, noting that the principles guiding offline discussion are not absolute in the virtual world.\(^10\) The Internet allows more cooperative, equal deliberation and decision-making, taking power away from the “elites” of society who control traditional media, political processes, and groups.

On the other hand, online civic engagement may not be as advantageous as many like to think. To better understand the limits of online engagement, consider the term “slacktivism.” Slacktivism is the idea that people are willing to click through a few websites or voice their
protests online, but unwilling to go any further. On Facebook, people tend to click “Like” to support a cause because “some people think that these symbolic acts create real change.”11 People may change their profile pictures on Facebook or may repost a status, but those actions may cause little to no change. Many politicians, scholars, and activists argue that slacktivism is in no way a substitute for offline action; in fact, some argue that because people feel that clicking “Like” on Facebook is active participation, the ability to organize people offline is hindered. One writer notes, “we have to accept that for the many, that's where the engagement stops.”12 One of the dangers of online activism, then, is that people will consider online discussion and action as substitutes for offline action.

Many of the Internet’s political advantages also presume anonymity, a double-edged sword in online participation. Anonymity simultaneously allows traditionally quiet voices to flourish and allows destructive behavior. A famous example of anonymity’s destructive nature is Juicy Campus, a website which allowed people to post anonymously about things happening on college campuses. The site quickly devolved into a nasty rumor mill and was eventually shut down because the discussions were completely destructive. Many teens have even committed suicide because of online bullying, facilitated by the capability of attackers to remain anonymous. There may be some legitimacy to the argument that “what the Internet and its cult of anonymity do is to provide a blanket sort of immunity for anybody who wants to say anything about anybody else, and it would be difficult in this sense to think of a more morally deformed exploitation of the concept of free speech.”13 Politically, there may be discussion online, but with the veil of anonymity, there is no guarantee that people will engage in a constructive dialogue. Often, trying to talk about problems online gets nowhere quickly, since anonymity often encourages people to misbehave.

The final disadvantage of online engagement is that “groupthink,” the tendency for like-minded people in groups to agree without disputing the ideas, is increasingly possible in closed
online communities. Private groups on Facebook, private web forums, and even technically public forums that only attract certain people, may shelter people from diverse perspectives. Though there is evidence that the web can expose people to various perspectives, there is also evidence that people can be self-selecting about which websites they visit and to whom they talk. A body of research suggests that social structures from the offline world, such as income and poverty, determine one's behaviors online; if that is the case, political engagement online may play out almost exactly as it does offline. Many have made the same argument about 24-hour news channels, such as MSNBC and FOX News, that as people have more control over the media they consume, they only select media with which they agree. In the same sense, as people select online communities to join, the communities can be fairly homogenous. Because the web is so vast, exact statistics and answers are not easy to come by; therefore, the current research on this disadvantage is not complete. Much research remains to be conducted on how people select online communities and whether they are truly exposed to diverse perspectives.

Whether the Internet is truly helpful in fostering political engagement is unclear; however, what is clear is that the web does have much power if used appropriately. Digital engagement may change our society in the future, but the current era of engagement may only be a point of transition. A new era of politics may be on its way, especially if politicians are to truly engage the Internet and engage the youth. Town hall meetings on Twitter and Facebook or Google+ hangouts with President Obama may be signs of the future. In the end, the full capabilities of the web are likely largely untapped. New avenues for participation will inevitably arise as more people utilize the web. My experiences with the web will surely pale in comparison to what future generations do with digital technology; for now, the lesson seems to be that the Internet is what we make of it.
Comprehension Questions

1. What are some advantages of online activism?
2. What are some disadvantages of online activism?
3. What is “slacktivism”?
4. What is “groupthink”?
5. How does anonymity impact the way people engage online?

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever talked about politics on the Internet? Where did you talk about it (for example, social networking sites or message boards)? Did you find it helpful or empowering to do so?
2. Are members of the “net generation” ready to become political and social leaders in the United States? How can youth get involved through the Internet and social media?
3. What can be done to prevent slacktivism? How much can online participation impact offline politics and life?
4. Do you believe the Internet truly gives a voice to more people? Do you believe online voices are effective in creating change?
5. Is online anonymity helpful or harmful for society? Are there certain scenarios when anonymity should not be allowed?
6. Can you imagine ways civic engagement might expand on the Internet in the future?
Cookies of Credibility: Youth before Congress  
Katrina Schauland

In the past few years, a number of national organizations have gone before Congress to support bills that address issues affecting American youth. A unique collaboration is formed between a national organization and the students who are actually affected by a particular issue. By working together with members of Congress, these alliances bolster one’s credibility, or, in Greek philosopher Aristotle’s terms, ethos. The Girl Scouts of the USA is one example of how such alliances are formed and demonstrate the results that collaboration can produce. Although each group, youth, national organization, and Congressperson has credibility on his or her own, the amount of influence increases exponentially when the groups work together instead of independently.

Elements of Speech

Logos, pathos, and ethos are three important qualities of a speech. Logos is the logical part of a speech and uses rationality and evidence for support; statistics about the frequency of school bullying would be an appeal of logos for a speech advocating for non-violence in schools. Pathos is a technique that makes an appeal to the audience's emotions; when a speaker says something that makes the audience angry, sad, or joyful, the speaker is using pathos. One example of pathos is when television commercials use pictures of cute puppies to persuade people to adopt pets from shelters. Ethos is the credibility of a speaker; it includes how much respect they earn from an audience due to their education, knowledge, and style of presentation. For example, a teacher or professor has ethos because of their education; the information they provide is viewed as credible.

Katrina Schauland is originally from Lewiston, MN. She will be graduating with majors in Communication and English and a minor in Leadership Studies. After college she hopes to find a job in community outreach/relations, community engagement and service learning, or public broadcast.
because of their extensive education. In a tutoring situation, the tutor has ethos by knowing a subject more fully than the person being helped; a student who knows how to create websites would have ethos when teaching someone who is a beginner.

Youth have ethos in a different way than national organizations or members of Congress. Youth who have been involved in an issue, whether it is victimization through bullying, being affected by drunk driving, or being exposed to a wrongful injustice, are able to speak to the actual problem being discussed. They are able to provide first-hand testimony and eye-witness accounts. These first-hand accounts have high ethos because the knowledge is direct and not hearsay. Just as a student who has been creating websites for years has higher ethos than a beginner, a student who has more experience and exposure to bullying or domestic violence has more ethos than someone who has never been bullied or been a victim of abuse.

For large organizations, ethos is formed by experience in and exposure to the national political realm. Having spoken to other large organizations and having connections across the country, the ethos of an organization’s representatives is formed by association with other notable people. Large organizations’ national involvement also gives them credibility because they have a wide influence with an expansive audience. Congressional Representatives have ethos because of their influential and authoritative positions. Due to their political work and hands-on experience of lobbying, their presence in presenting a bill gives high ethos to the bill itself.

With all three of these groups combined, an issue can be presented by a party that has high ethos in nearly every regard. The youth offer hands-on experience, the large organization is the knowledgeable and well-connected liaison between the youth and politics, and the Congressional Representatives offer credibility when a bill is actually introduced due to their knowledge of political action and lobbying. Youth, national organizations, and individual Congresspeople work together, create high ethos, and thus have the potential to have greater influence on creating a bill and getting it passed.
Case Study: Girl Scouts of the USA

Girl Scouts of the USA is a national organization that began in 1912 and was chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1950. Expanded over time to 3.2 million members, the Girls Scouts of the USA is a familiar face to American citizens and is a nationally recognized organization. As such, Girl Scouts of the USA is in a position to influence efforts of individuals.¹

In 2010, the Healthy Media for Youth Act was introduced to Congress. This act was initiated because a “national body image survey conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute . . . found that almost 90 percent of the 1,000 girls polled, aged 13 to 17, thought the fashion industry and media placed too much emphasis on being thin.”² In addition to that, a majority of girls think that the fashion industry does a bad job of representing people of all races and ethnicities; of greatest concern, the results showed that “thirty-one percent of girls admit to starving themselves or refusing to eat as a strategy to lose weight.”³

With many young girls and women feeling pressure from media for unrealistic physical expectations, the Girl Scouts of the USA decided to take action. The Healthy Media for Youth Act “would authorize grants to promote media literacy and youth empowerment programs, to authorize research on the role and impact of depictions of girls and women in the media, [and] to provide for the establishment of a National Task Force on Girls and Women in the Media.”⁴ It would work to increase media literacy for both boys and girls and to empower them in a variety of ways.⁵ With the organization Girl Scouts of the USA leading the charge, individual Girl Scouts had the opportunity to actually go to Capitol Hill; eighteen high school aged Girl Scouts from the Girl Scout Council of the Nation’s Capital participated in Girl Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill to encourage Congressional support for the Healthy Media for Youth Act.⁶

The girls mostly met with staff from the offices of U.S. Representatives, but they also had a few meetings with Representatives themselves. In the meetings, the girls highlighted Girl Scout programming and research, outlined the key parts of the bill, and shared personal stories to
emphasize the importance of the bill. At the end of the day, the girls attended a networking reception where they had the opportunity to meet people who work on Capitol Hill.7

Sponsored by Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin and Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, the Healthy Media for Youth Act had a strong base of support. The high school students who participated in advocating for the bill were able to provide their first-hand perspectives on the impact of how media depicts women and girls, the Girl Scouts of the USA served as the liaison and provided the structure to move forward with national programs, and the Congresswomen presented the bill to Congress. This coalition of forces had very high ethos with all their experiences combined.

Unfortunately, the first attempt to pass the bill did not succeed. This is a common occurrence of how legislative changes often progress; it is a process of stages and efforts that build on each other and will benefit future endeavors to make a difference. Similarly, women’s suffrage took decades of hard work; the early suffragists did not give up, and eventually women did get the vote. Although this first attempt for the Healthy Media for Youth Act was not passed, it is merely the beginning of efforts to make a worthwhile change; with support, this act or a similar one could be passed in the future.8

This collaborative effort, however, was not a one-time occurrence. In January 2012, the Girl Scouts of the USA launched “ToGetHerThere,” the largest advocacy and fundraising campaign dedicated to girls' leadership in history. According to the Girl Scouts of the USA, this multi-year plan “will seek to create balanced leadership — the equal representation of women in leadership positions in all sectors and levels of society — within one generation.”9 Following a panel discussion in New York City, on February 1, the Girl Scouts of the USA hosted an event on Capitol Hill that focused on the campaign, ToGetHerThere, as an advocacy program for girls. Girl Scouts asked Congressional leaders “to join them in supporting efforts to foster leadership in all girls, both nationally and in their respective constituencies,”10 continuing the relationship and
the efforts of these two groups. Legislators want to do the most good for the most number of people, and by knowing that a large constituent group, such as the Girl Scouts of the USA, is addressing an issue, Congress is more likely to acknowledge the efforts and consider bills. As another national organization, NEDA (National Eating Disorders Association), states on their website, “If you speak with the support of an organization, they are much more likely to hear your case than if you approach them solo.” 

**What You Can Do**

Going to Capitol Hill is not feasible for every youth, but there are other opportunities to get involved that are just as important. A good place to start is with petitioning your representatives for a particular cause. Ways to participate include joining an advocacy network and sending emails asking your members of Congress to support a bill. Social networks are also a good way to spread advocacy. Blogging about the issue, posting notes and information about it, or joining advocacy group fan pages are just the first steps in getting involved. Often, as in the case of the Healthy Media for Youth Act presented by the Girl Scouts of the USA, petition forms are available to sign on the organization’s website.

Youth have an ideal opportunity to work together with national organizations and Congress members to make a difference in legislation. With the combined experiences, first-hand knowledge, and political education, a formidable ethos is established that can affect real change.

**Comprehension Questions**

1. What are logos, pathos, and ethos?
2. What was the importance of the research and surveys conducted prior to the Healthy Media for Youth Act being written?
3. How did ethos likely influence the legislation regarding the Healthy Media for Youth Act?
Discussion Questions

1. About what issues affecting youth are you most concerned? What issues have you and your friends directly encountered? Issues in your school? In the community?

2. How does one get involved with an advocacy group?

   **Activity:** Find an advocacy group related to an issue discussed in question 1. Contact a school, community, or national organization that is already involved in addressing this issue, and add student ethos to the organization with your involvement and input. One way to contact the group and initiate your involvement can be through blog, email, Facebook, etc.

   After making initial contact with an advocacy group, what are some ways they provide to empower you to get directly involved? In what capacities can you volunteer your time?

3. Are there any circumstances where youth are exploited for ethos purposes?

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7 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
Beats, Rhymes and Action: Youth Voices in Hip-hop and Black Culture
Midya McPherson

The youth voice within black culture rang out during the Civil Rights Movement. Overtime, groups such as the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and the emergence of hip-hop music in America since the 1970s have continued to express that voice. Hip-hop has become more dominant within the culture and has done many things to encourage youth participation in regards to political and civic engagement. Hip-hop artists write songs with political and social messages, which are often emulated and practiced by listeners of the music. However, hip-hop artists have also taken many steps to be active within the political and public spheres, from organizing political events to creating educational programs for youth. There are many ways in which hip-hop artists encourage youth participation in public affairs that will enhance their knowledge of political rights, as well as helping each other within their respective communities. Therefore, this paper will show examples of action being taken by hip-hop artists and other groups within black culture to get African American youth involved in the political process as well as other civic engagement within the community.

Hip-hop emerged when Jamaican Clive Campbell, commonly known as Kool Herc, introduced dub music to America. “Dub music is a mix of Ska and Reggae, which places emphasis on drums, echoes, and other lead instruments such as piano.” Hip-hop has four elements that include graffiti, b-boying or break dancing, DJing and MCing. In the beginning of hip-hop, DJ’s created the beats and rhymes of hip-hop. MC means “master of ceremonies,” and their job is to go on stage in front of a group of people to rap lyrics. Graffiti represents the visual aspect of the music; artists and followers alike paint on walls their favorite rapper or song. B-boying represents

Midya McPherson is from Hagley Gap, Jamaica and majored in Communication and Business Management. She plans to pursue a career in marketing or events planning and hopes, in a few years, to continue on to graduate studies, researching communication and media.
the dance aspect of the music as artists showcase their dancing skills by competing with each other. Now over thirty years old, hip-hop dominates the music industry. The political discourse within hip-hop music has also grown over the years, as many artists used their music to spread political and social messages; some have even formed organizations to influence political action within their communities.

Before the emergence of the hip-hop genre, there were groups such as the Black Arts Movement (BAM) that practiced political action by creating poetic programs that youth could use to actively participate in public affairs. BAM essentially continued the works of Civil Rights leaders by encouraging African Americans to get involved and use their political rights to create change. That is why in the 1950s and 1960s, people protested, challenged and resisted inequality. No matter the consequences, people in different communities realized that if they didn’t fight for change, then nothing would happen. There was music in these times to help people cope, but the music was backed by people being active in their communities, working together for change. Therefore, the Black Arts Movement (BAM) got young people to go out into the communities and perform plays or poems about political and social issues around them.

Furthermore, for BAM, “there is a close relationship between morality and aesthetics, especially the black aesthetic that its advocates believed generated from the politics and history of black freedom struggles.” BAM was formed in a time of racial and class disparity in America. However, BAM was more concerned with “how the arts can revolutionize or fundamentally transform the consciousness of ordinary people and move them from anger to action.” Basically, BAM used the African aesthetic to get youth interested in public affairs. This trend continued when hip-hop gained credibility within the music industry.

BAM was a very present force within African American communities. “BAM also inspired many blacks to establish their own publishing houses, magazines, journals, and art institutions.” Whether it was through plays, literature, or poetry, BAM engaged youth in a positive way so that
they didn’t have to resort to any violent or criminal activities. Furthermore, BAM created and distributed vast amounts of inspirational poetry, drama, and literature, which they used to encourage political action, as well as to uplift black communities. BAM essentially paved the way for the creativity and innovations now seen in hip-hop music. Hip-hop music took on the responsibility of celebrating black culture, as BAM did, and also preaching messages about social and political issues. Hip-hop also created ways to get youth involved. This tradition is still alive today, and it continues to encourage youth to exercise their will by creating positive changes in their communities.

For the African American community, hip-hop not only is a means to earn money, but an artistic expression of events happening within the culture. Hip-hop music has major influences on youth, as they are encouraged that they, too, can showcase their artistic abilities, while at the same time highlighting the social and political struggles of race, wealth, and status inequality in America. Furthermore, according to Michael Eric Dyson, author of Know What I Mean, “The genius of hip-hop is that its adherents convince each other---its devices are meant to immediately disclose the truth of life through reportage.” Hip-hop artists influence each other, as well as their listeners. Through the messages in their songs, community outreach and teaching programs, hip-hop is making a conscious effort to enact positive change that youth can emulate by practicing what is preached in the music, or by engaging each other about hip-hop music. For example, Professor Mark Anthony Neil has included popular hip-hop producer and DJ 9th Wonder into his classroom at Duke University for the last few years to teach students about both the culture and politics of hip-hop and how hip-hop can positively change youth.

Some actions that hip-hop artists have taken to get African American youth involved in communities happen outside of the music. Even though songs are a great way to express political views, organizations that lead to action have power to get youth directly involved in their communities. “The power of hip-hop is not in record deals or celebrity… hip-hop's power is
realized in truth and self-determination through community activism.”9 One person who took on the role of getting youth involved is Russell Simmons. Russell Simmons is a hip-hop mogul and entrepreneur, who leads an organization called Hip-Hop Action Network (HHAN). Simmons organized many events geared at raising money for education, to encourage youth to vote, and other positive activities within African-American communities.10 For example, it is said that his organization, at their hip-hop summit in New York, registered 12 million youth to vote in the 2004 elections under the slogan “vote or die.”11 This means that if youth don’t take the opportunity to exercise their political will, then they have no voice in issues facing their communities. This action by Simmons and his team encouraged many youth to get involved in the political process.

Many hip-hop artists have made efforts to be more accessible in their communities, especially to youth. For example, Sean P. Diddy Combs formed Daddy’s House, a non-profit organization for urban youth that funded programs through the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, as well as providing tutoring and life skills programs for nearly 800 boys and girls on the weekends.12 Combs’ contribution to these clubs serves as positive encouragement for youth to learn about civic engagement and the political process. In 2004 Combs also created a group called Citizen Change to rally voters.13 Even though this group was disbanded after the elections of 2004, the fact that artists such as Combs made an effort to get youth involved was significant for hip-hop and black culture: it signaled that political activity was not just important, but also “cool.”

In the 2008 presidential election, many artists—such as Sean Combs, Jay-Z and Lil Wayne—wrote songs compelling youth to vote for Obama, and youth turned out to vote in droves. But hip-hop artists did more than simply write songs leading up to the 2008 elections. As Troy Nkrumah of the National Hip-Hop Political Convention stated, “[t]here is no denying [Obama] has excited a lot of street cats that might have not engaged if it were not for his
Moreover, according to Dyson, “[w]hile black music at its best has often supplied a supplementary argument for political change, it is not a substitute for actual politics. What is needed is a strongly-grounded organization that will enact change.” While the music can increase awareness on issues, “it cannot alone transform social relations and political arrangement.” Therefore, hip-hop artists made a significant change and likely impacted the election of Obama because they went out into the streets and encouraged youth to actively engage in the political process of 2008.

Producers of hip-hop music also do their best to encourage youth to get involved via civic engagement. For example, JT, otherwise called “Bigga Figga,” through his recording company Black Wall Street, organized community outreach programs that brought gangs together to resolve issues. He did this by linking hip-hop artists together with promoters in his community, and by teaching youth about video editing, music distribution and other aspects of hip-hop music. This is significant in urban communities like his, because he is channeling youth to use their voices for positive things rather than getting into fights. His effects enabled youth to feel empowered to want to make positive contributions to their community. Also, by using hip-hop artists as role models, JT knew that it would likely get youth to participate because these youth emulate hip-hop artists in other ways, too.

Other important voices within African American culture also come from colleges across America. For example, in 1990, African-American students at Michigan State University formed a group called “My Brother’s Keeper.” More than twenty years later, this group still goes into the public schools in Detroit to teach youth about their heritage, using hip-hop as well as other black aesthetics. These college students are using hip-hop in a positive way to engage youth. Furthermore, they also encourage them to volunteer in their communities and to be kind to each other. Another important way that hip-hop is creating change is that artists have created websites and are using social media to interact with youth. For example, hip-hop artists Sean
Combs and Big Boi used social media to interact with students about the recent case of Troy Davis, which caused many to question the death penalty.\footnote{20}

Hip-hop remains a dominant force within African American communities and is continuing to impact the entire world though music. However, hip-hop’s greatest contribution, arguably, is employing artists to use their influence on youth to encourage them to get involved in public affairs that affect them. This is important because the music alone cannot instigate change; there has to be a foundation on which to build. Forming organizations and getting youth to vote or volunteer is a significant way to exercise political rights. Hip-hop has the medium to create positive opportunities for youth, especially those in urban and troubled areas in America. Thus, as the music industry continues to grow, hip-hop artists must continue to create ways in which youth motivated by the music can actively participate in their communities.

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. What are the four elements of hip-hop?
2. How and why did hip-hop music developed in New York?

**Discussions Questions:**

1. Is organizing youth to participate in political action only around election time enough to get youth meaningfully involved in the political process?
2. How can hip-hop artists do a better job in engaging youth voices in public affairs?
3. Do you think hip-hop music should be taught in the classroom? If so, how can it be used as a learning device for youth?
4. Is social media an effective way to organize youth participation in public affairs? What alternatives might be more effective than social media?
5. Do you consider hip-hop to be more effective as an art form or as a form of political discourse? Can or should it be both?
2 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
10 Dyson, Jay-Z, and Nas. *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip-hop*
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Dyson, Jay-Z, and Nas. *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip-hop*
16 Ibid.
17 Smitherman, *Words from my Mother: Language and African Americans*
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Bullying and Political Language
Matthew M. Muza

Bullying is a problem that our schools have been facing for a very long time, and it only continues to escalate. This can be seen in recent years with the rise of school violence and other bully-related problems, such as the numerous students committing suicide because they have been bullied. This led many states to pass laws that require schools to adopt an anti-bullying policy. As The Huffington Post reported, “between 1999 and 2010 more than 120 bills were adopted by state legislators to introduce or amend legislation that addresses bullying, harassment or similar behavior in schools.” 1 While all of these bills were, for the most part, highly supported by the people within the districts in states that adopted legislation, the legislation itself does very little to actually implement anything to prevent bullying and to stop bullying-related suicide. Politicians have a tendency to use symbolic language and gestures as allusions to a real solution. They want to make the public believe a successful solution has been found when, in reality, little, even nothing, was truly accomplished. To analyze this, some of the theories and ideas laid out in the book The Symbolic Uses of Politics by Murray Edelman will be used.

Bullying happens in schools all across America every day. There have been numerous marches, protests and demonstrations by parents, teachers, and, for the largest part, students. All this is done to pressure state governments and school boards to adopt laws to deal with the issue of bullying. In many cases, this has been seen as a triumph of student involvement in influencing the development of policies that affect them. One problem that can be seen, however, is the use of language, by politicians, that students are unable to clearly understand. Students want to have a role in the democratic process, by voicing their opinions and helping to create the policies that

Matthew Muza is a senior pursuing a double major in Philosophy and Communication. He is from Menomonie, WI and is planning on attending law school.
affect them; however, as will be seen in the case study, through the use of symbolic language, politicians can divert attention away from solving an issue and create more problems.

Murray Edelman argues in his book that politicians use a series of symbols to influence public perception of legislation. These symbols can be broken down into two categories: referential symbols and condensation symbols. Edelman describes referential symbols as, “economical ways of referring to the objective elements in objects or situations: the elements identified in the same way by different people.” Referential symbols are typically short and concise and are given as quick facts about an issue. For example, the statistic that was presented, that more than 120 bills passed between 1999 and 2010 in anti-bully legislation, is a referential symbol. The purpose of referential symbols is to use statistics and other agreed-upon facts as evidence in order to influence public decision-making or perception.

Edelman describes condensation symbols as, “symbols that evoke emotions associated with the situation.” Condensation symbols also prove to be highly effective at altering public opinion because of their ability to tap into the underlying emotional feelings of the audience. An example of this would be a politician talking about a very identifiable personal experience. One such example of this can be seen in a Christian Science Monitor article that detailed a White House summit in which President Barack Obama talked about the issue of bullying in American schools and went into detail about his own personal experience with bullying. This then ties into the final idea taken from Edelman, in which he talks about political leadership.

When Edelman talks about political leadership, he talks about different styles of leadership. The one that is most relevant to the issue of bullying within schools is the passive style. He describes the passive style to be, “basically the avoidance of firm positions on controversial subjects while at the same time posturing as protagonist against an evanescent enemy, thereby retaining or increasing political support from large numbers of antagonists on both sides of controversies.” What this means is that if politicians find themselves in the position of
having to address a controversial issue, they will avoid making any strong statements in favor of one side over the other. This can be seen during the Obama White House summit when President Obama strongly encouraged federal officials, educators and even all adults present in the room to help make schools a safer place for children and to continue to promote an anti-bully climate. He did not say anything about any new policies that should be adopted or steps that should be taken towards reaching that goal; he just said that we should continue to promote an anti-bullying mentality.

Case Study

The case that will be examined is the Michigan Anti-bullying Law that was adopted on December 6, 2011. The law that was passed through is called “The Matt’s Safe School Law” and was named after Matt Epling, an honor roll student who killed himself at the age of fourteen in 2002 after repeated harassment by bullies at his school. After the high-profile incident there was a great deal of pressure on the Michigan legislature to create an anti-bullying law. This high public pressure, coupled with the fact that Michigan was one of only three states to not yet adopt an anti-bully law at that time, led the legislature to begin drafting what is now known as “Matt’s Law.” The history of how politicians and the media marginalized Matt’s Law displays some of the methods that Edelman discussed.

To begin, when looking at the law itself, it is an example of the passive leadership style that Edelman discussed in his book. The Michigan legislature saw bullying as a hot-button issue; without a clear cut solution to the problem, they found it difficult to write a strong policy that would satisfy the demands of the public outcry. As taken from the Matt Epling website, under the “What is Matt’s Law?” tab, “Matt’s Law” will require every school district in Michigan to have an anti-bullying policy.” The intent of the law was to be a guideline to help schools that did not have a formal anti-bullying policy to begin developing one, but the law itself went little beyond just mandating that all schools have a policy.
However, this does not mean that the law itself, despite the Michigan legislature adopting this passive style, was free of controversy. As reported by the Washington Post of November 6, 2011, a line that was put into the law said that it “does not prohibit a statement of a sincerely held belief or moral conviction.” The concern that was raised by this line was that an individual could become exempt from punishment under the new law if the reasons behind their bullying were out of religious belief or moral conviction. The worry was that this ambiguous language within the bill would be exploited as a loophole that would, in fact, allow for bullying instead of preventing it. As controversy over this ambiguous line continued, the legislature that drafted the bill lost a crucial public supporter: Kevin Epling, the father of Matt Epling and one of the most vocal supporters of Michigan anti-bullying legislation. Because of this loss of a major public supporter and continued bad press over the ambiguous line, the line itself was dropped from the law.

The next and final way in which this case fits with Edelman’s theories is in regards to the condensational symbols. This can be seen by looking at the events surrounding the final signing of the bill into law. During the event, the Governor of Michigan, Rich Snyder, shared with the audience and media the fact that he was a victim of bullying. Snyder went so far as to say, “I was bullied in elementary school, in middle school and in high school because I was a nerd.” He then went on to express that, “I am very proud of this [anti-bullying legislation], bullying is just wrong and bad.” Kevin Epling, Matt Epling’s father, who was also present at the signing of the bill into law, stated for the media, “[t]oday we won one for the kids of Michigan, but it took us a very long time.” The governor’s statements function as condensation symbols because of the signing’s ability to convey a great deal of emotion from not only those who were present, but from those who heard the event via media. The governor’s admission of being a “nerd” and being picked on in school helped to drive home the fact that this is an issue that is not isolated to a small group of people. Instead, his admission makes the emotional argument that bullying can and does happen...
to anyone and that by signing this bill that problem is being solved. In actuality, from what we know and can understand by looking at the signing of the anti-bullying law, in the great scheme of things, it is merely one small symbolic step towards the end goal of preventing bullying.

As a student and as a citizen with a stake in issues you care about, it is important that you recognize the way that politicians, through the media, use ambiguous language. As seen in the Michigan Anti-bullying Law, ambiguous language has the ability to slow down legislation and jeopardize the purpose that a law is meant to serve. As students and as citizens, it is important to take control of the language that surrounds your issues so that, if and when it reaches the level of policy making, just like in the “Matt’s Law” bill, you will be able to demand control of the power to define the meaning of the words that will impact your life.

Comprehensive Questions
1. What are referential symbols? condensation symbols?
2. What is the passive style of political leadership?

Discussion Questions
1. If you were put in charge of creating a bullying policy for a new school in your district, what are some things that you would want it to have and how would you deal with students breaking the rules that you have set into place?
2. What type of language would you use to educate the members of the community including but not limited to parents, students and school-board members (about new policies)?
3. Select a youth issue other than bullying and find speeches politicians have delivered on the topic. Do they use referential symbols, condensation symbols or passive style?
4. How can we go about understanding what a politician is trying to say under all that symbolic language?


3 Ibid.


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.
On a clear October’s day in 2010, 215,000 people gathered on the National Mall. They were there for a rally with a prominent and famous speaker. And for what were these people rallying? Sanity. And when do they want it? Now. The event was The Daily Show host Jon Stewart’s Rally to Restore Sanity, a satirical event billed as a “Million Moderate March.” This essay will examine The Daily Show and Colbert Report, and the Rally to Restore Sanity, discuss criticisms of Stewart and Colbert, and finally examine how these shows affect youth participation in politics.

The Format of the Shows

The Daily Show is a satirical news program hosted by comedian Jon Stewart. It is a late-night half-hour show aired four times per week on Comedy Central at 10pm CST. The set of the show looks like that of a standard news program, with the host (Jon Stewart) sitting behind a desk. The show opens with a monologue from Stewart, discussing a current event and providing humorous commentary. After the first commercial break, there is a segment where a correspondent reports on another story, often through interviews or “on site” reporting. During this interview, Stewart plays the “straight man,” while the correspondent frequently makes outrageous claims for comedic effect. The final segment of the show is devoted to interviews with guests, frequently authors, politicians or entertainers. Presidential candidates generally appear on the show during the election cycle.

Stephen Colbert, the host of Colbert Report, was originally a correspondent on The Daily Show but started his own program in 2005. Colbert plays a character with the same name as himself; the character “Colbert” is a pompous, right-wing pundit. Colbert is very “Pro America” and frequently takes his love of the United States over the top to mock the overly patriotic.

Vicky Weber is a Communication major with minors in Politics & Government and Nonprofit Business Management. Originally from Wisconsin, after graduation, she plans to attend graduate school at Colorado State University for a Masters’ degree in Communication.
Colbert’s show follows Stewart’s and the two frequently reference each other.

Each host has written books that go along with their shows. Jon Stewart is the author of America the Book: A Citizen’s Guide to Democracy Inaction, which is a parody of a high school civics textbook and mocks how history and civics are taught in schools. Stewart also published Earth: A Visitor’s Guide to the Human Race which reads like a science textbook and explains Earth to extratrestrial visitors. Colbert is the author of one book, I Am American and So Can You!, in which Colbert’s character explains how the reader can become just as “American” as he claims to be.

The Rally to Restore Sanity

Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert announced the Rally to Restore Sanity on Thursday, September 16, 2011. Jon Stewart had been building up to the announcement for some time, commenting during several episodes in the two preceding weeks that he would have “an announcement” to share. The episode began with Jon Stewart discussing the Pope’s then current visit to England, but he interrupted himself to make the announcement of “The Rally to Restore Sanity,” a rally to be held Saturday, October 30, on the National Mall. Jon pitched the event as one for the average, rational person, noting, “You may be asking yourself right now sitting at home, ‘But am I the right type of person to go to this rally?’ The fact that you would even stop to ask yourself that question . . . That means I think you just might be right for it.” During the episode of Colbert Report following Stewart’s announcement, Stewart’s counterpart, Stephen Colbert, announced his own protest, the “March to Keep Fear Alive.” As the rally approached, the two events were merged into the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear when it was revealed that Stephen Colbert didn’t have the proper permits to hold a rally.

The actual Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear featured Stewart and Colbert in their characters from their respective TV shows. They argued over if sanity or fear should be the primary method of dealing with the current political climate. Often these battles were had through the use of guests. For example, Stewart and Colbert had a battle with dual songs about trains. Stewart’s guest Yusuf Islam sang the song “Peace Train” while Ozzy Osbourne appeared to
sing “Crazy Train.” Eventually the two compromised and sang “Love Train” with the O’Jays. Other celebrity guests and performers were featured during the rally. Towards the end, Stewart gave out “Medals of Reasonableness” to individuals he felt had acted reasonably in the past year. Colbert gave out “Medals of Fear” to those he felt exemplified reasons to embrace a fearful response to political discourse. After the awarding of medals, Stewart proceeded to take the stage to deliver his final remarks. At this point in the Rally, he called for a more serious examination of our political discourse. Stewart noted that even though we have disagreements, we work together every day within society: “We hear every damn day about how fragile our country is, on the brink of catastrophe torn by polarizing hate. And how it’s a shame that we can’t work together to get things done. But the truth is, we do. We work together to get things done every damn day.” Stewart’s concluding speech established sanity as superior to fear in political discourse and that we should all strive for a more sane political climate.

Responses to The Daily Show and Colbert Report

Responses to The Daily Show and Colbert Report are not universally positive. Some view these programs as nothing more than frivolous humor and the viewers as politically unmotivated. On his television show in 2004, Fox News commentator Bill O’Reilly said to Jon Stewart, “You know what’s really frightening? You actually have an influence on the presidential election. That is scary, but it’s true. You’ve got stoned slackers watching your dopey show every night and they can vote.” O’Reilly argued that the show’s influence on its audience is dangerous and that the viewers are incapable of making their own decisions about voting; instead, they just listen to Jon.

Others have argued that the shows increases cynicism in youth about the political system and that this cynicism could lead viewers away from the polls. A 2004 study found that viewers were more cynical about politics when presented with video clips from The Daily Show compared to The CBS Evening News. The study reported that, "Ultimately, negative perceptions of candidates could have participation implications by keeping more youth from the polls."
Because the shows portray politics in a negative manner, those viewing the shows might be turned off from politics and participating in them.

In contrast, research indicates that viewers of *The Daily Show* have been shown to be more politically conscious and knowledgeable than others. A 2004 study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that viewers of *The Daily Show* were more knowledgeable about the candidates than a great deal of other demographic groups. The humor in the show assumes a working knowledge of the news; without it, the jokes do not make sense. If a person does not understand the reference to a current event, they will miss the humor and be likely to change the channel.

**A Different Kind of Political Engagement**

Political satire and comedy are essential forms of political communication and commentary. Whether one is a fan of their comedy or not, the impact of the *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* on youth engagement in politics is significant. While some people like Bill O'Reilly do not believe the viewers of *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* have any political legitimacy, massive attendance at events like the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear, high ratings on TV and the overall political knowledge of these audiences shows the exact opposite. While O'Reilly might find it “frightening” that Stewart’s audience can vote, if they were really the slackers that O'Reilly implies, they wouldn’t make the effort to cast a ballot anyway. These audiences, however, do cast their votes and affect politics. *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* can provide an avenue for a new kind of political discourse: one that explains the news while critiquing it at the same time. The shows invite political discourse among their viewers. This political discourse can lead to more politically-engaged citizens of every age.

It is important to remember, however, that simply watching Stewart and Colbert does not make a political statement. An hour of “fake news” every night can’t cover all the main stories, nor can it provide full, unbiased coverage of any one story. Audiences of any age should realize that political humor is cynical by its very nature; it points out what is wrong with the current system by poking fun at it. This is not a call to cynicism or giving up; it is, instead, a call
to action. By illuminating what is wrong with the current political environment, such shows give us, as citizens, a call to action to make things better.

Comprehension Questions

1. What was the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear?
2. Who are Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert?
3. What are some of the arguments against shows like The Daily Show?
4. What are some of the arguments in favor of shows like The Daily Show?

Discussion Questions

1. Stephen Colbert’s character on Colbert Report is imitating a right wing pundit. Suppose Stephen Colbert were to give a speech out of character. Would you believe what he was saying?
2. The Daily Show and Colbert Report have been accused of not being serious political discourse. How is it possible for humor and satire to function as serious political discourse?
3. Do you think the viewers of The Daily Show and Colbert Report are more along the lines of “slackers” or are they politically-engaged citizens, but just engaged in a different way?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of alternative political engagement?

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2 The phrase “Million Moderate March” comes from Jon Stewart’s announcement of the Rally on The Daily Show.
3 Video of the episode where the Rally was announced can be found at http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-september-16-2010/rally-to-restore-sanity.
4 The video of the speech can be found on the Comedy Central website at http://www.comedycentral.com/videos/index.jhtml?videoId=363864.
Perspectives on Youth Participation in Politics

We polled a variety of people and asked: How can we encourage youth participation in the political process?

Jill Ottow, Executive Director, Jefferson County Literacy Council, Inc.
The best way to engage anyone in an activity is to find ways to connect them to the cause or process, and this is no less true of our youth. Exposing them to things going on in the political process by reading, watching and discussing the news together in a variety of formats, as well as taking them with us when we vote and to see films and hear speakers that deal with political issues are ways to engage them. Gearing some of it to concerns of young people, such as fighting in wars, tuition costs, voting rights or marriage and reproductive rights and giving them opportunities to explore and form their own opinions (rather than merely imposing our own views) is sure to capture attention in a long-lasting way that will engage them in the process for a lifetime.

Kat Griffith, language and social studies teacher
We can encourage youth participation in the political process by bringing into the classroom real, contemporary issues that cry out for a response. For example, in one class we were studying the history of the US-Mexico border. After seeing a documentary about a toxic dump left by an American factory in Tijuana, the students raised money for a local environmental justice group there.

High School Senior*
You can encourage youth participation by connecting with them on the Internet through Facebook, Twitter, or Youtube. Make videos about issues that youth might care about and show them how to get involved.

Dick Zellmer, citizen, over 37 years of service in U.S. Navy
A great example of how to get high school age students involved in civic engagement is to use simulations. Through these, students learn to look at their country though the perspective of another nation rather than only through a western viewpoint. The end result is a much better informed student who can look at the world through many new perspectives. All in all, a dynamite way to learn.

Lisa Crawford, mother of elementary school students
While my children are only in elementary school, I feel it’s imperative that they understand the basic structure of government. Kids should accompany their parents to the polling places to learn about our election process. As they mature, they should hear their parents, grandparents and other important adults in their lives discuss what is happening in the community in which they live. Family dinners are a great way to begin these types of discussions; kids should be welcome to offer their opinions. If we include our kids early on in their lives, it will be a habit as they mature into adults.
High School Senior*
Just try and explain the importance behind voting or being part of a political campaign, tell them that everyone counts and that one person could decide the difference.

Amy Maciolek, ELL Teacher / R.H.S. Technology Mentor, Ripon Area School District
Encouraging youth participation in the political process involves many aspects. Within the realm specifically of English Language Learners, it has to start with a basic understanding of identifying key differences between their heritage political process and that of the United States. I believe that ELL’s should be made aware that they can contribute to building community or society as a whole and we should recognize that these youth are capable of having opinions and ideas about tough issues. They should be given opportunities to express those ideas and issues especially in what matters most to them and their circumstances. A true democracy should value and include all participants regardless of age, race and gender.

High School Junior*
The key to getting younger groups of people involved in the political process would be to have candidates seem like they’re not only talking to the older members of communities. Whenever a candidate speaks for people they always make it seem like they mean the older population.

Jamie Teuteberg, athletic trainer for high school students
I believe education is at the grassroots of any topic and is vital to its success; unbiased education is the best way to mold well-rounded voters and involved youth. Teaching the process without influencing students about which political party to vote for would be ideal. Everyone should have their own voice heard.

Kenda Fluegge, parent of elementary/junior high students
It is important to educate the youth on how vital it is that they learn who the candidates are and take the time to vote according to what is meaningful and valuable to them. I get very discouraged by all the negative publicity that goes along with the campaign processes. I pray that there will come a day when the candidates spend their advertising dollars on broadcasting what is important to them instead of bashing their competitors and airing out the dirty laundry from the past.

High School Junior*
People running for office can encourage more young people to get involved by making the debates more understandable to people who are not political junkies.

Kelly Eggert, Primerica consultant, mother of children ranging from elementary to college-aged
I believe we can and should do a better job from K-12 in teaching/requiring American History and Civics classes. As a part of these courses, students should have read the Declaration of Independence and the amendments several times before graduation –should be required of all voters!

Kris McDaniel, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Social Studies Consultant
To encourage political engagement, the answer is almost always education. The more that someone knows about a topic and why it matters (in whatever way it matters to them personally), the more likely they are to want a say in it. Have you ever tried to get someone excited about something they just could not care less about? It doesn’t happen. Therefore, to engage youth, there must be a tie to what they care about. If children were taught to think critically from an early age, and encouraged to question and analyze, research shows that they are much more likely to be politically active as they grow older.

High School Senior*
Make the advertisements youth attractive. Make us as the youth want to vote, not just because of political reasons. Make it more inviting. It’s too plain!

* Note: Names of minors omitted to protect their privacy.

We also asked some young Ripon College alumni who work in the political realm: What can politicians do to better engage youth in politics?

Garrison McMurtrey, Ripon College class of 2011, Regional Field Director with Organizing for America in North Carolina
Getting the youth fully engaged and involved in the political process has been a tough battle in the past, but I believe that since 2000, there has been a continued strategy by politicians to reach out more to younger voters. Communication is key in getting the young involved. They need to feel inspired and wanted. Reaching them through the way they communicate in this day and age, whether through Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube is very beneficial and can help highlight pivotal issues. I believe that we must talk about things that ring important to them. Topics such as student loans and jobs are things that get the youth engaged because they directly impact them and they can see and feel the burdens.

BJ Dernbach, Ripon College class of 2005, Policy Advisor to Wisconsin State Representative Dan Knot
From my experience, the best way is to let them know about the advantages to volunteering, if not in the political process, in general. They need to know that in a competitive market place, making and having personal connections is extremely important for any job field they may aspire to. When it comes specifically to the political process, show them that volunteering in a campaign helps develop resilience and self-confidence. Nothing beats going door to door in a random neighborhood to solicit votes to develop those skills.
From my perspective, students are more engaged when they move beyond an understanding of "politics" in the traditional sense of watching the news or voting - and instead realize that political processes happen in the aspects of their life they hold most dear. For instance, if I have a student who is obsessed with sports, I might encourage her to think about controversies within the sporting world that she might feel are unjust. Just to name a few, these controversies might address racism, sexism and gender equality, the exploitation of college athletes, corruption in college sports, labor issues, violence, health and safety issues, or the use of sport for nationalistic purposes. Currently, I have a student who is researching brain damage suffered by hockey players who have experienced concussions and other head injuries. When students can explore the political processes at work in their favorite activities, the ones that consume their daily lives, learning can come from within.
Guide to Civic Engagement

**How Government Affects You**

- All laws are created by government, from speed limits to smoking bans.
- The federal government provides financial aid for college students, including grants and loans.
- Local school boards make decisions concerning school funding, curricula, calendars, and more. Public school boards are composed of publicly-elected officials.
- Taxes are used for various purposes in your community, including roads, public buildings, and fire and police protection. You likely pay sales taxes and may pay income taxes if you are employed.
- Local governments create policies specific to minors, such as local curfews restricting times when people under a certain age (usually 17 or 18) can be out without adult supervision.
- Government can create many programs, such as public health coverage, Medicaid, garbage disposal and recycling, free and reduced lunch programs, and library programs.
- Police and fire protection are provided through taxpayer dollars to safeguard the community.
- Alcohol and tobacco regulations, such as restriction by age, are government policies.
- The judicial system is a branch of government. Criminal and civil cases are handled by the judicial system. For those 18 and older, you may be summoned for jury duty, a required commitment to the government.
- The federal government oversees food and drug regulations, protecting consumers by ensuring food and drug safety.
- Government controls regulations on clean air, water, and the environment.
- The federal government declares wars and military conflict.
- The federal government sets the age and restrictions for Selective Service, the military draft.
- Voting laws and restrictions are created by government on the local, state, and federal levels.

**Finding your Representative**

**Federal**

- If you have a computer with Internet access, visit www.house.gov.
- Next, go to the box in the upper right hand corner of the screen that says, “Find your Representative.”
- Enter your zip-code into the box and hit “go.”
- This will bring up the name of your representative, a picture of them, a picture of your Congressional district and a link that will take you to their website where you can find out more information about your representative.
- There you will also find a list of ways in which you can go about contacting them.
- To find your senator, you will go to www.senate.gov.
- At the top of the web page find the box that says, “Find your Senator.”
- Click on the down arrow and find your state.
- After selecting your state you will hit “go” and that will take you to a page that gives you information about both of your state senators.
- This will include address, political party affiliation, telephone number and a link to their website which you can use to contact them.
Local

- Most cities have websites that will direct you to local government buildings (ex. town/city hall, courthouse, Chamber of Commerce.)
- Check these locations and/or the website for more information on how to contact your city council member, mayor, school board representative or any other official.
- Try asking a teacher, parent, or guardian for more information.

Questions to ask Politicians

- What is your position on continuing education after high school?
- Do you think there is enough financial aid or grant money available for high school graduates to attend college?
- Do you feel the fine arts are important for schools? Why are the arts usually first to get cut when there is a budget crisis?
- Many countries in Europe have banned all athletic programs/competition within their schools. Thus, students are encouraged to do all sporting activities at independent facilities. Do you think this program could work in America? Why or why not?
- Do you think politicians' pay is fair compared to that of many other Americans? What could be done to fix that gap?
- With the current economic crisis still looming, and the high unemployment rate, do you consider college a good investment?
- Every few years, there seems to be a major shooting in our high schools. How do you think we can prevent school shootings?
- Do you think there should be stricter rules on the access to dangerous weapons such as guns?
- What steps will you take to address the problem of bullying in our schools?
- Do you think that high school students now are using drugs more than in previous times? What can be done to discourage drug abuse?
- What are your views on television shows such as Skins, which depict high school students taking various kinds of drugs and having sex publicly? Is that an accurate depiction of American youth today?

Ways you can get involved

- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on an issue you feel strongly about.
- You have a right to contact your Representative and tell them how you feel about an issue. See the section, “Finding Your Representative,” to find out how.
- Attend a school board meeting. Most are open to the public and set aside time for community comments; this would be an ideal time to attend and express support for or concerns about a particular topic.
- Contact your local Chamber of Commerce. They will be able to give you a list of volunteer/intern opportunities in your community.
- If you support a specific candidate, volunteer to help with the campaign. Campaigns can always use student volunteers.
- Talk to your student council about finding a way to register high school students to vote.
- VOTE! As soon as you turn 18 you can register to vote.
- Volunteer at caucuses and primaries.
- Find a topic you care deeply about and find an advocacy group in your area – this can often be found online, in local newspapers, or simply by talking with members of the community.
- Join an advocacy network.
- Send emails asking your members of Congress to support a particular bill.
- Use social media networks (Use as a supplement to other forms of civic engagement – see essay “The New Democracy: Civic Engagement through Online Discourse”).
- Blog about the issue.
- Post notes and information about particular issues or bills.
- Join advocacy group fan pages.
- Use the interactive mapping tool on this page to locate federally-supported youth programs in your community: http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/GeoProgramSearch.aspx.
- Consider joining a club or organization that facilitates youth involvement. Some examples include Girl Scouts of the USA, Boy Scouts of America, 4-H, FFA (Future Farmers of America).

**How to Vote**

**In order to register in Wisconsin you must:**
- Be a US citizen.
- Be 18 years of age by the date of the next election.
- Have lived at your current address for at least 28 days.
- Not be disqualified from voting (a felon in prison, on parole, or ruled incompetent by a court).

**Step 1: Gather Information**
- Your driver’s license number or the last four digits of your Social Security Number (only if you do not have a driver’s license).
- Your current address.
- Your previous address, if you have registered before.

**Step 2: Register to Vote**
You need to register before you can vote. In Wisconsin you can register up to and even on the day of the election. The process is fairly quick and usually takes only a few minutes. There are three ways to register:
- **Register with your City Clerk.** Visit your City Clerk’s office. Just walk in to your City Clerk’s office prior to the Friday before the election and they can help you register.
- **Find a Deputy Registrar.** Before elections, people called “deputy registrars” volunteer to help people register to vote. Usually you can find them at public places such as libraries, malls, grocery stores, and schools.
- **Register on Election Day.** If you did not choose to register in advance, you can still register on the day of the election. Just make sure to bring your ID and proof of your address.

**Step 3: Find your Polling Place**
- You can find where to cast your ballot at www.vote411.org. Just enter your address and the site will give you the address of your polling place.

**Step 4: Make your Decision**
- Do some research and decide for whom you plan to cast your vote. See the “Resources for More Information” section for some sites you can visit to help you make your decision.
Step 5: Go Vote!
- At your polling place you will be given either a paper ballot or directed to an electronic voting machine. Either way, poll workers will walk you through the process. Make sure you bring your ID, as it may be required in some areas.

Resources for More Information

General Information and News:
- Local library: Many libraries have collections of government information, and librarians can help you learn about issues at the local, state, federal or even global levels.
- Local newspapers, radio and TV stations: Local media is great for understanding issues in your hometown.
- Major media: Many major media outlets, such as The New York Times and Chicago Tribune, publish some articles for free online.
- National Public Radio: National Public Radio (NPR) covers interesting stories in depth and it is free to listen. You can listen online at www.npr.org
- If you're considering donating to a charity, check out Charity Navigator http://www.charitynavigator.org/, which provides reviews of different charities, showing how each charity spends its funds.

Finding Government Information
- If you're looking for information about the government, such as Congressional hearings, the budget, and economic indicators you can search http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/.
- If you're looking for information about current and past legislation, you can go to: http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php.
- If you're looking for more general information about the government, go to http://www.usa.gov/. This user-friendly site provides links to frequently requested information, smartphone apps and more.

Miscellaneous Information
- For general information about how the public feels on different issues: http://www.pollingreport.com/.
- A great, simple guide to government to share with younger kids can be found at http://bensguide.gpo.gov/.
- Looking for interesting talks on a variety of topics? Go to http://www.ted.com/.
- The Center for Democratic Deliberation does research on civic engagement and provides educational resources for those looking to learn more at http://cdd.la.psu.edu/.
- Voices of Democracy: The Oratory Project promotes the study of great speeches while encouraging civic engagement. Visit it here: http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/.
# Online Resource Evaluation

Use this tool to help assess the quality of online information.

## Title of website: __________________________

## URL (address): ____________________________

### AUTHORITY:
- Name of Author: ______________  __Not Available
- Name of Organization: ______________ __Not Available
- Domain: ___org ___com ___net ___edu ___gov ___other
- Can the author be contacted?  ____yes ____no

### CURRENCY:
- Date created: ______________ __Not Available
- Last updated: ______________ __Not Available
- Current enough for your topic?  ____yes ____no

### COVERAGE:
- Is the information presented thoroughly?  ____yes ____no
- Does the site seem to present good, educational information?  ____yes ____no

### ACCURACY:
- Do you think the information is true?  ____yes ____no  ____idk
- If the document quotes statistics, can you tell if the statistics are from a reliable source?  ____yes ____no  ____n/a
- Is the site free from typos and/or grammatical errors?  ____yes ____no

### OBJECTIVITY:
- Is the information presented with a bias from one side of the issue or is it presented fairly and objectively?  ____biased  ____objective
- Is there advertising on the page from organizations with a bias?  ____yes ____no
- What is the purpose of this site?  ____to inform  ____to sell  ____to persuade  ____to entertain  ____other

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Note: Adapted from materials contributed by both high school and college faculty.