



University of Crete Research Center

UCRC

for the Humanities, the Social & Education Sciences

LECTURE SERIES 2019

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“One Size Doesn’t Fit All: Connecting Views of
Activism with Youth Activist Identification”

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ABSTRACT

Identity is crucial to social movement participation. Existing research examines why active people “avoid” activist identities but has less to say about how active people adopt such identities as if they automatically follow participation. We draw on interviews with high school and college students from a mid-size southwestern US city to examine how young people make sense of what it means to be an activist, who identifies as such, and why youth are willing—or unwilling—to adopt this label. We find that respondents’ conceptualizations of “activists” are critical to (non)identification. Those who see activism as a broad category are more likely to identify, holding constant their level of activity. Those who see activism as a greedy institution, requiring significant substantive fluency, making the issue their primary focus, and willingness to sacrifice, do not, despite their level of engagement. Our findings have implications for identity formation and movement participation more broadly.

Jennifer Earl is a Professor of Sociology and (by courtesy) Government and Public Policy at the University of Arizona. She taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) before joining Arizona. She is Director Emerita of the Center for Information Technology and Society and Director Emerita of the Technology and Society PhD Emphasis, both at UCSB.

Her research focuses on social movements and the sociology of law, with research emphases on the Internet and social movements, social movement repression, and legal change. She is the recipient of a National Science Foundation CAREER Award for research from 2006–2011 on Web activism and has received over 1.25 million dollars in grant funding since earning her PhD. She is also a member of the MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics. She has published widely, including an MIT Press book entitled *Digitally Enabled Social Change*, which examines how the use of Internet affordances are reshaping the basic dynamics of protest online and was awarded an Honorable Mention for the Communication and Information Technologies Section of the American Sociological Association's Book Award in 2013. She was inducted in 2016 to the Sociological Research Association, an honorary association for sociological researchers. She is also the recipient of a university-award for excellence in undergraduate research mentoring in 2010–2011 and another university-wide award for the most outstanding assistant professor on her campus in 2005–2006.

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